SCENES

IN

FEUDAL TIMES.

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FEUDAL TIMES.

A Romance.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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SCENES IN FEUDAL TIMES.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remembered in thy epitaph.

SHAKESPEAR.

THE attendants of the marchioness had been early dismissed, and unobserved she reached her apartment. For some time she indulged the train of pleasing ideas which the conversation of the count had excited; for his

artful allusions had renewed in its pristine strength her attachment to him. But as these gradually subsided, her thoughts reverted to the subject which had before engaged them.

The recent interview, by dispelling her imaginary fears, left her more at liberty to perceive and appreciate the real dangers which threatened her, if De Sombreuil were unsuccessful in his attempt. That the count was wandering in the grounds at this hour, appeared to her no less extraordinary than unfortunate. Perplexed and unable to form an accurate opinion whether he suspected her design on Jacqueline, she suffered all the torment of uncertainty; for her own agitation at first meeting him had prevented her observing his. A sound, the least want of caution, might betray to him the purpose of De Sombreuil, and entail on

her his endless aversion. Reflection increased her uneasiness. Her fate seemed to depend on this hour. Inactivity at such a crisis was impossible. Alternately she traversed her apartment, or from the window watched for the return of De Sombreuil; till her alarm and impatience, augmented every moment, rendered longer suspense insupportable.

With cautious steps the marchioness descended to the garden. As she crossed the lawn towards the apartment of Jacqueline she was startled by a distant noise like the clashing of swords, followed by an indistinct murmur. She paused to listen, but the sounds returned no more. The moon had been set some time, and the light of the stars was insufficient to penetrate the surrounding gloom. For a moment the marchioness was appalled by

superstitious horror. She dared not to raise her eyes from the ground, lest they should encounter some terrible object. This emotion was no less transient than powerful, and she soon despised herself for having even for an instant submitted to it. The feelings which had before prompted her to shun the theatre of her guilty projects, gave place to others of a very different character. A selfish fear of danger rendered her insensible to humanity, and she no longer felt reluctance to enter the scene of death.

On approaching the balcony which communicated from the garden with Jacqueline's apartment, the marchioness was surprised to perceive the door of the oratory open. She knew not what to think. The circumstance was inexplicable. Could De Sombreuil have negligently left it thus, or was

her vengeance not yet completed? Her apprehensions of detection increased to a most painful height. She hesitated whether to advance, but the misery of protracted uncertainty overbalanced her reluctance; and emboldened by the perfect silence which reigned within the apartment, she ventured to enter.

De Sombreuil, when he so abruptly quitted the marchioness, was labouring under a conflict of emotions. He was no hireling assassin; and though he descended to become the confidant, and even active accomplice in the criminal projects of the marchioness, her depravity inspired him with abhorrence and contempt. It was not her designs, but his own, more secret, refined, and dreadful, which he sought to accomplish. By a strange coincidence all her plans had advanced his:

the death of Jacqueline was their consummation; and with an eagerness, as if he feared that his prey would escape him, he hurried towards her apartment.

Though unalterably resolved to execute his sanguinary purpose, he did not wish to encounter her tears or intreaties. Sleep, he hoped, would spare him useless importunity. This hope was realized. Jacqueline slept unconscious of the near approach of death. Exhausted by grief and anxiety, she enjoyed in a gentle slumber a temporary respite from her present sorrows, and the gloomy presages of the still more dreaded future. Since the command of the marchioness had confined Jacqueline to her apartment, she had indeed suffered a solitary seclusion. No friendly voice broke the dreary monotony in which the hours passed. Hope-

less of relief, she heard their departure announced with a desperate calmness bordering on apathy, while she reflected that each brought her nearer to the fate which she abhorred.

With cautious silence De Sombreuil entered the oratory. On the altar a taper was burning, and on a sopha, at a short distance from it, Jacqueline reclined. Her veil not wholly withdrawn partly shaded her countenance, marked with an expression of the sad ideas which had occupied her waking thoughts. De Sombreuil, as he advanced towards his victim, gazed not on her, but round the room. His eyes rested on the altar; his lips moved, yet they uttered no sound. With frantic violence he struck his hand on his forehead; and hastily removing the folds of his garment, he drew forth a

dagger, and prepared to strike the blow.

Suddenly De Sombreuil felt his arm seized. He turned with quickness, and endeavoured to disengage himself. In the struggle which ensued, a furious stroke, which De Sombreuil designed for the bosom of his adversary, was by a dexterous movement turned on himself. He staggered and fell. His senses fled; but not before he perceived his successful opponent bear Jacqueline from the apartment.

De Sombreuil, weltering in his blood and still insensible, was the first object which the marchioness beheld on entering the oratory. She came prepared for horrors; but this spectacle, so wholly unexpected, totally overcame her. Faint and trembling she sunk on

a seat, for astonishment and dismay fixed her to the spot. It was the apprehension of her own danger, not compassion for the unfortunate being before her, which thus afflicted her. Towards him she felt only resentment; for his failure in this attempt had hazarded her safety.

Provoked, distressed, and alarmed by the absence of Jacqueline, her presence of mind at first deserted her. Was it the count who had snatched her hated rival from her power? This idea roused her from her torpor, and with the thirst of vengeance revived her recollection and activity.

The marchioness immediately summoned the domestics; and the household, surprised and terrified, was quickly collected: but in all the tumult and confusion neither the marquis nor

count appeared. In obedience to the reiterated commands of the marchioness, some of the attendants had hastened to their apartments; but they could not be found, and it was soon ascertained that they were not in the chateau. This intelligence threw the marchioness into a perfect phrenzy; and with a vehemence which astonished the domestics, they were despatched to seek them in the grounds. In the mean time De Sombreuil was raised and borne into the adjoining chamber. His sufferings excited in the selfish mind of the marchioness no pity. Unable to render her any service at this critical conjuncture, she considered him too insignificant for her notice; and wholly intent on frustrating the supposed designs of the count, she displayed towards De Sombreuil the most culpable indifference.

The groans which the motion and examination of his wound extorted from De Sombreuil, reached the marchioness. Disgusted, and eager to escape from those sounds of anguish which her crimes had occasioned, with precipitation she quitted the oratory, and hastened to the saloon which opened to the garden.

Half an hour elapsed, and none of the domestics returned. To the marchioness the minutes seemed endless, as in a state from which either madness or insensibility would have been a desirable refuge, she continued traversing the saloon. No corporeal punishment could exceed, or perhaps equal, the mental torments which she endured. Jealousy, hatred, envy, every bad passion raged at once within her breast with demoniac fury. Of the absence of the marquis she was

wholly unable to conjecture the cause; till, as if to complete the catalogue of her misery, the idea occurred that perhaps he was acquainted with the retreat of Blanche, and was now enjoying her society.

A confused clamour, mingled with lamentation, attracted the attention of the marchioness, and restored her reason. The sounds soon became more audible; the doors of the saloon were thrown open; and the marquis, desperately wounded, was borne in by his attendants. Not expecting to find the marchioness there, no means had been used to apprize her of his situation. She immediately concluded that he had discovered and opposed the removal of Jacqueline, and the only grief or regret which she felt arose from the apprehension that his endeavours had been unavailing.

Instead of offering him those attentions which his deplorable condition claimed, even from a stranger, the marchioness eagerly inquired for the count. The answers which she obtained only augmented her uneasiness. No one had seen him; but near the spot where they found the marquis, a large effusion of blood was observed, from which a track proceeded to the edge of the canal. The fears of the marchioness now took a new turn; and half distracted with apprehensions for the count's safety, she approached the marquis, hoping to gather from him the particulars which she was so anxious to learn.

The wounds of the marquis, though not instantly mortal, precluded the possibility of his recovery. Had not his sensations convinced him of this truth, the countenances of those

around him would not long have permitted him to doubt. He was speechless, but his faculties remained unimpaired; and his looks, devoid of their usual haughtiness, sufficiently expressed his gratitude for the efforts made to relieve him, and his conviction of their inutility.

From the affected sympathy of the marchioness he turned with disgust; and casting on her a glance of reproachful disdain, motioned to her to leave him. Disappointed in her expectation of gaining information, the marchioness readily complied with this intimation, which freed her from the disagreeable necessity of feigning emotions foreign to her heart. Could she have been assured of the safety and continued affection of the count, she would have regarded the death of the marquis as a desirable event, nor have

scrupled to accept the hand which had consigned him to the tomb.

In this extremity the usual duplicity of her character was neglected; and utterly careless of the opinions and surmises which her behaviour might excite, and callous to the increasing agonies of the marquis, her whole attention was directed to obtain intelligence of the count: and for this purpose many of the domestics were again despatched into the garden and grounds. During their absence the marchioness indulged in violent transports of grief, or with frantic haste continued at intervals to pace the apartment.

The strength of the marquis gradually decreased. He had sunk into a stupor, and his last hour seemed rapidly approaching; when, unannounced, Sir Edmund, who had that moment ar-

rived at the chateau, entered the saloon. His astonishment at the extraordinary scene before him may be easily imagined; but every other emotion gave place to pity when he beheld the situation of his brother.

With affectionate solicitude he endeavoured to lessen the sufferings of the marquis, whose errors and unkindness were entirely erased from his memory. He remembered him only with fraternal tenderness, as the associate of his infancy and youth.

A violent convulsion seized the marquis. He unclosed his eyes, and found himself supported in the arms of his brother. A smile, and a pressure of the hand, were all the signs of recognizance which he could give. He endeavoured to speak, but his strength failed him: the effort was too much,

and with a deep sigh he resigned his breath.

The marchioness as soon as convinced that this event had taken place, approached the marquis, and seizing his hand, in a strain of passionate lamentation which ill accorded with her previous neglect of him, bewailed his loss.

The attention of Sir Edmund had been so exclusively engaged by the marquis, that the agitation and even presence of the marchioness had till now escaped his notice. Her excessive distress, which he attributed to very different motives from the real, strongly interested him in her favour, and with a friendly concern of which she was unworthy he besought her to moderate her affliction, and retire from

a scene which could serve only to increase it.

With his concluding request the marchioness immediately complied. She wished to reflect on the conduct proper for her to adopt on this occasion, and perceived with satisfaction the construction which Sir Edmund had put on her extreme disorder. His resemblance to the marquis, and the officious attendance of the domestics, had quickly informed her of his consanguinity; and while apparently abstracted from all that was passing, she had been diligently observing him and endeavouring to penetrate his character.

Few things could be more unwelcome to the marchioness than the return of Sir Edmund at this conjuncture,

but she was sensible of the importance of impressing him with a favourable opinion, which could alone enable her to execute the plans of happiness, or if they were impossible, those of revenge, which she meditated. With these views she concealed her vexation at his presence; and her dexterous dissimulation was completely successful.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ah! what is life? With ills encompassed round,
Amidst our hopes fate strikes the sudden wound.

GAY.

AFTER encountering innumerable hardships, the affairs of the Christians in Palestine assumed a more favourable aspect; and their arms becoming formidable, they were able to conclude an advantageous truce. The news of his mother's death had reached Sir Edmund soon after his arrival in Egypt, and the subsequent letters of the baron and Jacqueline conveyed a lively picture of the deep affliction into which that event had plunged them. At that period the critical situation of the allies would not permit Sir Edmund to

relinquish with honour his professional duties, or he would immediately have hastened to offer those consolations which it was evident they greatly needed, and which he was sensible neither the inclination nor manner of the marquis was likely to afford.

The successes of the Christians, and the subsequent cessation of hostilities, presented the opportunity which Sir Edmund had long desired; and followed by the affectionate regret of all who had served under him, and with increased glory, he at last returned to Europe.

As Sir Edmund approached Fitzbaynham castle, he experienced a mingled emotion of joy and grief. By turns each predominated: joy, when he anticipated the shortly expected meeting with friends so beloved; and

grief, when he recollected that the one from whom at his departure he had found it most difficult to tear himself, no longer existed to welcome his return.

From this subject the attention of Sir Edmund was recalled shortly after his entrance on the domains of the baron, by the desolation apparent on all sides. The dwellings of the vassals were deserted; instead of the numerous herds which formerly decorated the surrounding meadows, trees overthrown, fragments of broken weapons, and agricultural machines, were thickly scattered; and the vestiges of fire and sword were every where visible.

In Sir Edmund these appearances excited no less astonishment than distress. In his family there existed no hereditary feud, and the pacific cha-

racter of the baron rendered them still more unexpected and extraordinary. With increased speed he hurried forwards towards Fitzbaynham castle. The first glimpse confirmed his apprehensions. Its dismantled walls and half demolished towers announced that it had shared the general ruin. In silence Sir Edmund and his small retinue crossed the forsaken courts and entered the hall. Cold, dreary, and despoiled of its splendid ornaments, it presented a cheerless scene. Of the banners preserved as the trophies of their ancestors' prowess, formerly suspended between the lofty arches, some tattered fragments alone remained; which slowly waving in the wind by their uncertain shadows augmented the general gloom.

Every part of the edifice was equally forlorn; and Sir Edmund, supposing

it wholly uninhabited, was about to quit it, when some persons issued from an obscure passage in which they had taken shelter. At sight of Sir Edmund and his party, they fled with precipitation towards their retreat. Surprised by this conduct, Sir Edmund called to them. His voice was no sooner heard than immediately recognizing him, they with one accord welcomed his return and hailed him as their deliverer.

From these people Sir Edmund first received intelligence of the outrage committed by Earl Godemar, and the subsequent absence of the baron and Jacqueline. Indignant at the insult, and supposing that they had fallen into the power of the earl, and were suffering tedious captivity, Sir Edmund resolved to attempt their rescue, and inflict on the earl a chastisement proportioned to his insolent temerity.

With this intention he collected the scattered troops and vassals of the baron. Only few days elapsed before a sufficient force was assembled to begin the projected operations. All the dependents of the baron hastened with alacrity to join Sir Edmund, and gladly quitted the caves and other retreats in which they had sought refuge from the ravages committed by the victorious bands of Earl Godemar. That nobleman, disappointed in his design of securing Jacqueline, took every opportunity of gratifying his malicious rancour, and found little opposition from the terrified vassals of the baron. Destitute of a leader, and without any plan of defence, after some ineffectual resistance, they had been compelled to quit their habitations; and the castle not being in a condition to afford the necessary protection, they had reluct-

antly abandoned it to the fury of the exasperated earl.

The presence of Sir Edmund, and the judicious arrangements which his experience in military affairs enabled him to form and execute, joined to his personal bravery, soon changed on his part the nature of the contest from defence to attack. His efforts were so well designed and ably supported, that the domains of the baron were quickly freed from the incursions of the enemy; and prosecuting his successes, he invested the castle of the earl.

Sir Edmund, unwilling to involve the baron and Jacqueline, whom he still imagined to be in the power of the earl, in the calamities inseparable from a siege, once more renewed his pacific proposals; insisting, as a pre-

liminary, on the immediate liberation of all the prisoners taken in Fitzbaynham castle.

To the haughty earl nothing could be more mortifying than the situation in which the decisive measures of Sir Edmund had unexpectedly placed him. The threats of the marquis, which, fully acquainted with the indolence of his character, he knew would never be realized, had only provoked contempt and incited new aggressions. In Sir Edmund he had expected to find a more formidable opponent; but relying on the advantage which his generally acknowledged skill in military science gave him, opposed to the youth and probable inexperience of Sir Edmund, he had rejected with disdain the former overtures.

The earl, still lingering under the

wounds which he had received in his attack on the baron's castle, was incapable of personally opposing the rapid progress of Sir Edmund. Sickness had in some degree mitigated the violence of his disposition, and disposed him to receive and consider the advice and representation of his officers, who unanimously recommended to him to accept the proffered opportunity of terminating a contest from which neither honour nor profit seemed likely to accrue. But solicitation and remonstrance were long employed, before the earl could be prevailed on to comply with Sir Edmund's demand, and release the prisoners.

Among these was father Osborne. From him Sir Edmund learned that neither the baron nor Jacqueline had fallen into the hands of the earl. To her absence from the castle on the

night of the attack Jacqueline was indebted for her safety; and the earl's wounds obliging him to retire, his followers, intent on securing their valuable plunder, had so negligently executed the scrutiny which they were directed to make after the baron, that he had been able to elude them; but by what means, or whither he had withdrawn, Osborne was ignorant.

Sir Edmund, anxious to prosecute his endeavours to discover the baron's retreat, and thinking the earl sufficiently punished by the lingering indisposition which his wounds had occasioned, readily received his overtures for peace. In adjusting the terms of an accommodation mutually desired there could be little difficulty, and Sir Edmund soon had the satisfaction of restoring security to the domains of the baron.

In his attempts to obtain intelligence of his father, Sir Edmund was less successful; for his removal had been so secretly conducted, that it was known only to those who had accompanied him. It was not till the return of the boatmen who had conducted the baron to France, that he was able to obtain information which led to the discovery of the truth.

During Sir Edmund's residence in Asia he had been present at the capture of a town which had long resisted the arms of the allies, and which they had been particularly desirous to reduce, in order to effect the liberation of many Christian slaves confined there. The objects of misery which this motley group, composed of various ranks and of all the nations of Europe, presented, strongly interested his humanity. Those whose age and strength

permitted active exertion, immediately entered the army by whose valour they had acquired their liberty; but others, depressed by sickness and many years of suffering, and incapable of encountering fresh hardships or perils, afforded Sir Edmund an opportunity of indulging his benevolence, by contributing to their immediate necessities, and providing them with the means of returning to their respective countries.

Among those to whom Sir Edmund extended this seasonable relief, was one, whose appearance and manners particularly attracted his attention, and who, after regarding Sir Edmund some time attentively, approached him and requested an audience.

"Had I not heard your name," said the stranger, "your resemblance to the baron and to one still dearer would

have been a sufficient testimony of your lineage. Forgive the abruptness to which my agitation compels me, Does Eloise yet exist?"

The scenes and occurrences in which Sir Edmund since his departure from England had been continually engaged, had not effaced the remembrance of the baron's extraordinary behaviour on the first appearance of Sir Almeric at Fitzbaynham castle, or the embarrassment and grief of the baroness when he had questioned her on that subject. Often in the retirement of his tent he had recalled the words of the baron, and vainly endeavoured to pierce the mystery which encircled his family. His astonishment may be easily conjectured when in such a distant part of the world he found himself suddenly interrogated respecting one of whose existence he was utterly ig-

norant, and whose name he had never heard except in the paroxysms of the baron's remorse on that memorable night.

"Your silence is fatal to my hopes," said the stranger, who was intently watching Sir Edmund, and to whom his unaffected surprise was apparent. "I am enured to calamity. You need not hesitate to reveal her fate." The perplexity of Sir Edmund was increased by the extreme distress which the stranger manifested when he declared his inability to reply to his questions. "O Fitzbaynham," he exclaimed, "to what a labyrinth of misery has your intemperate resentment consigned me!" With the most painful apprehensions of their justice Sir Edmund recollected the self accusations of the baron, and with no small degree of anxiety re-

quested of the stranger an explanation of his words.

"Though," said the stranger, "the recital will perhaps be painful to us both, it is necessary: but you must excuse my briefly passing over events on which even at this distance of time I cannot dwell without the keenest anguish. I am Albert, Marquis Villena. Twenty years since, I was the dearest friend of the baron. So entire was our confidence, that he was acquainted with all my actions, except one which a mistaken principle of honour withheld me from disclosing. From that fatal concealment sprang all my subsequent misfortunes. My intimacy with the baron afforded me opportunity of perceiving and appreciating the beauty and merits of his sister. To know Eloise was to love

her. Adorned with all that renders her sex estimable, she soon inspired me with a passion as sincere as violent, and which with emotions of indescribable delight I became at length convinced was mutual.

"It had always been the command of my father, and indeed the only point on which he had attempted to control me, that on pain of his eternal displeasure I should never bestow my hand on a foreigner. Fully aware of the consequences of disobedience, I yet found it impossible to renounce my love for Eloise. A private marriage seemed the only way by which I could secure her without forfeiting my father's kindness.

"The influence which I possessed over Eloise enabled me to prevail on

her to assent to this expedient. A few months of uninterrupted happiness followed; but this blissful period was at length terminated by the pressing solicitation of my father for my return.

"The situation of Eloise, rendering concealment much longer impossible, induced me more readily to comply with his request. In the joy which my presence would afford him, perhaps I should find some favourable opportunity to disclose my marriage. This hope supported me when I bade adieu to Eloise; but surely the apprehensions which then seized me were prophetic. Since that period I have never beheld her.

"Our correspondence during my absence was conducted by the Chevalier Sebastian, who voluntarily undertook

that office. I then entertained no suspicion of his motives, but reflection and experience have since made me mistrust the zeal which he displayed on that occasion. It had never been my intention to make him the confident of my marriage, but either by chance or design he discovered our frequent interviews; and I conceived it necessary for the honour of Eloise, to disclose our union, and my reasons for concealing it from the baron.

"The prejudices of my father were perfectly invincible. All my efforts to overcome them were unavailing. In this vain attempt nearly two months passed, when my anxiety for Eloise led me to return privately to France. The difficulties which I had to encounter with my father, much greater than I had expected, determined me, if Eloise did not object, to reveal our

marriage to the baron. Pride had prevented me from making this communication before. I felt a reluctance to solicit as a favour an alliance, in which, had not the unhappy severity of my father compelled me to a clandestine suit, I might have been considered as conferring rather than receiving honour.

"The chevalier, who alone knew of my return and the resolution which I had taken, requested to prepare Eloise for an interview previous to my appearing at the chateau; and it was settled that I should remain at a short distance in the forest till he came to conduct me to her. I had scarcely reached the appointed spot, when I beheld the chevalier approaching, accompanied by the baron.

"I had little leisure for conjecture

on this unexpected circumstance; for the baron, at sight of me, drawing his sword, rushed forward, at, the same time calling to me to defend myself, if I thought life destitute of honour worth preservation. Could any thing at that moment have increased my astonishment, it would surely have been the behaviour of the chevalier. Instead of interfering to prevent a catastrophe which from his former professions of friendship to both he might be supposed anxious to avert, he only staid long enough to hear the reiterated refusal of the baron to listen to me, and his inflexible determination of taking immediate vengeance.

"Though the unappeasable resentment of the baron compelled me to draw in my own defence, and, depriving him of his usual skill, often put his life in my power, neither my

love for Eloise, nor the regard which in spite of his violence I still felt for him, would permit me to take advantage of those opportunities. During the contest I frequently conjured him to hear me; for well acquainted with his character, I was fully convinced that he was acting from some false impression. This opinion the sudden desertion of the chevalier confirmed, and induced me to believe that the baron's fury was the result of his treachery.

"The length of our encounter, and the many wounds which I had received, did not, I perceived with regret, abate the ardour of the baron, till a furious stroke at once disarmed me and pierced my bosom. The moment I fell, the baron seemed to regain his reason. He threw his sword from him, and hastily approached me. Of what

immediately followed I am ignorant; but when my senses returned, I found myself on board a vessel belonging to a party of desperadoes, who in their passage through the forest from one of their incursions had discovered me. Though my condition appeared desperate, the richness of my apparel induced them, in the prospect of a liberal reward, to attempt my recovery.

"In compliance with my desire they altered their course, and returned down the Mediterranean for the purpose of landing me in Spain; but adverse winds drove us near the coast of Africa, where after combating their fury some days, it was our fate to be captured by a pirate. All were condemned to slavery, and even the immense ransom which I offered could not save me from this ignominy. My promises provoked only scorn and in-

sult. Of all animosities, that engendered by a difference of religion is surely the most implacable: even avarice when opposed to it, had, I found, lost its influence. For two and twenty years I continued to endure existence, and I was looking forward to death as the only termination of my misery, when the success of the Christian arms unexpectedly restored me to liberty. I have suffered much; but if Eloise yet lives, if she yet preserves undiminished her affection for me, and I once more behold her, all my misfortunes will be amply recompensed. In the depth of misery the idea of her grief has been my heaviest affliction."

Convinced of its fallacy, Sir Edmund heard with regret the hope which the Marquis Villena entertained of still meeting Eloise. He remembered that in his short conversation with the baroness

on this subject, she had spoken of her as no more. So had the baron in his exclamations. To undeceive the marquis on this point was painful to the feelings of Sir Edmund; but considering it more cruel to suffer him to indulge and strengthen expectations which must be disappointed, he ventured in the gentlest terms to prepare him for her loss.

The distress which this intimation produced in the marquis increased the affectionate sympathy with which his manners and melancholy narration had inspired Sir Edmund; who omitted none of the attentions of friendship to mitigate the evils which he could not remove. In the marquis sorrow was the prevailing emotion: he even felt no resentment towards the baron, to whom the supposition of his death

must, he was aware, be a constant source of remorse and misery. He knew that the great foible of the baron's character was irascibility, and justly considered that a conduct so inimical to his general habits originated in some sudden provocation which outraged his pride or honour.

The Marquis Villena accompanied Sir Edmund, who at the time of their meeting was on the eve of his departure from Asia; and anxious for an explanation in which his happiness was so deeply concerned, and which the unexpected absence of the baron from England had delayed, he hastened with Sir Edmund to Guienne: but as they approached the chateau his agitation became so great as to render him incapable of immediately proceeding. At his desire, therefore, Sir

Edmund had pursued his journey, and left him with father Osborne to follow as soon as he was sufficiently recovered.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I think of nothing else; I see, I feel it.
YOUNG.

THE remainder of the night in which the Marquis Omfredo expired, was spent by the marchioness in the retirement of her apartment, not in bewailing his loss but in considering the most probable means of effecting the designs which she projected. The indulgence which she had long given to her passions, naturally violent, rendered her incapable of restraining them, and many hours were passed by her in a conflict between love and jealousy.

Great as she had always considered her affection for the count, she was till

now ignorant of its extent. His desertion at the moment when her long cherished hopes might have been realized, disclosed at once to her the violence of her passion and his total indifference. Yet even this mortifying discovery would have been unable to withdraw from him her regard. In him centered all the tenderness of which her disposition was capable. He was the sun of her existence, and when deprived of his presence all was storms and clouds. But the idea that his heart was devoted to another, that heart for whose possession she had sacrificed so much, roused all the fierce vindictive passions, and imparted to them an energy before unknown.

Young, vain, and haughty, accustomed to uninterrupted prosperity, she felt more keenly the disappointment of her fondest wishes. Towards Jacque-

line her animosity was deadly. She experienced a fury of resentment which extended even to the count. Love yielded to jealousy; and to destroy the happiness raised on the ruins of her own, became the leading purpose of her thoughts.

The enchanting scenes she had often pictured, the visionary but delightful creations of fancy which were to follow her union with the count, recurred to her memory, only to augment her regret, and give an additional stimulus to her vengeance. "Rather," she exclaimed, "would I behold him dead than the husband of another; never shall Jacqueline enjoy that triumph: If he cannot be mine, at least he shall never be hers."

Listening only to the suggestions of jealousy, such was the resolution of the

marchioness, which neither reflection nor the tenderness which she still felt for the count could induce her to alter. To accomplish this design without betraying herself, was not easy; but conceiving that to prejudice Sir Edmund against the count and Jacqueline, and induce him to pursue them, would be the most certain method, as well as the least hazardous, she requested an interview with him.

Sir Edmund, on entering the apartment of the marchioness, was strongly affected by the solemnity and air of grief which universally appeared. The lattices, nearly closed, excluded the sun, and admitted only a gloomy funereal light. An elegant disorder, the negligence of sorrow was every where apparent; for with seeming carelessness the whole had been artfully disposed to produce this effect.

In a melancholy attitude the marchioness reclined on a sopha. Her countenance expressed profound affliction, but mingled and corrected by submission. Seldom had her beauty been displayed to more advantage; devoid indeed of its usual brilliancy and fire, but rendered more captivating by the soft and touching sensibility which characterized it. Her dress, adjusted with elaborate skill, was adapted to express the languor of dejection which she assumed. In its arrangement even the inattentions allowable in extreme distress were employed with success to increase the general design, while they concealed the art by which it was effected. Around her, as if hastily displaced in the first transports of sorrow, were scattered the splendid ornaments which she had worn on the preceding evening.

Apparently absorbed in grief and unconscious of Sir Edmund's presence, the marchioness continued gazing on a portrait of the late marquis, taken while a child, which decorated one of the pannels; till with a deep sigh she withdrew her eyes suffused with tears, and then, as if first perceiving Sir Edmund, she seemed to endeavour, though for some time ineffectually, to control her emotions.

Unacquainted with the character of the marchioness, this appearance of affliction, which he believed sincere, produced on Sir Edmund the effect which she designed, and engaged at once his sympathy and friendship.

"I am sensible," said the marchioness, addressing Sir Edmund, "that I ought to intreat your pardon for having sought this interview, aware as I

am that the spectacle of my grief, which I can neither subdue nor conceal, will increase yours. My regard for your sister, and the urgency of the case, are the only excuse which I can offer. In spite of the inconsolable affliction with which her error, not to use a harsher term, has overwhelmed me, I still love her, and would if possible preserve her from the dangers and calamities into which she has so precipitately plunged herself. Probably," she continued, perceiving the surprise of Sir Edmund, "you are unacquainted with many recent circumstances which have occurred in the family, and have not heard of the unfortunate affection which Jacqueline, in opposition to all our wishes, has persevered in indulging towards Count Cajetan. His suit from the beginning was unpleasing to the baron and marquis, but Jacqueline found means to extort, though with

extreme reluctance, the baron's consent, and this morning was appointed for their nuptials. The marquis, anxious to prevent an alliance which he considered disgraceful, prevailed on me to represent to Jacqueline the impropriety of this marriage, and if possible to induce her to relinquish it; but my efforts were unsuccessful, and I fear only contributed to produce the catastrophe which has for ever destroyed my happiness."

This idea seemed to renew the grief of the marchioness. She paused for a short time, as if incapable of proceeding, while the astonishment and concern manifested by Sir Edmund, encouraged her to pursue the insidious deception.

"It was on the evening of yesterday that my conversation with Jacqueline

took place. With regret at its failure I related it to the marquis. The event justifies the apprehensions which it immediately excited in him, though I then thought them injurious to Jacqueline, and such as it was impossible that she could ever realize. But expecting our further opposition, and probably fearing that the baron might retract his consent, she yielded to the count's importunities, and the still more forcible pleadings of her own heart, and renouncing the protection of her friends, she has privately quitted the chateau with him. The marquis suspected this design, though his regard for his sister would not permit him to make it public by taking measures to prevent its accomplishment; still hoping that duty and honour would restrain her, if prudence failed. But, alas, this hope was vain; and in his endeavours to detain her the mar-

quis met his fate!" The voice of the marchioness failed, her head sunk on the cushions which supported her, while for some minutes she appeared lost in an agony of sorrow, but was in fact attentively observing the effect which this narrative produced on Sir Edmund.

Had he entertained the slightest suspicion of the motives of the marchioness, her ascribing to Jacqueline a conduct so contrary to her disposition would have confirmed it; and her description of the conduct of the marquis, so little according with his selfish indolence, was equally liable to doubt: but Sir Edmund, deluded by her well-feigned distress, conceived that her affection for the marquis had led her to perceive imaginary virtues in him, and to interpret all his actions more favourably than perhaps they deserved.

Jacqueline's dereliction of duty, and the delicacy which distinguished her, Sir Edmund found it more difficult to reconcile; while the tender attachment which had always subsisted between them gave additional poignancy to his regret when he reflected on her misconduct. His esteem for her would have rendered him incredulous of this intelligence, had it not been communicated by the marchioness. The friendship which she professed for Jacqueline, the pity and regret with which she mentioned her errors, joined to her extreme affliction while speaking on the subject, completely banished from the mind of Sir Edmund every doubt of her sincerity.

The marchioness perceived with secret pleasure the implicit credit which Sir Edmund gave to her recital; but sensible that it would not bear examin-

ation, and fearful of allowing him time to reflect, she thought it prudent in some degree to dismiss the violent grief which she had affected. "Happy," said she, "would it have been for Jacqueline, had you arrived some hours sooner. Your interference would probably not have been unavailing: it may not even now be too late to rescue her from the count. It was the hope that this event, so important to Jacqueline and all interested in her welfare, might be accomplished, which induced me to struggle with my grief while I acquainted you with these circumstances. An immediate pursuit, directed by you, could scarcely fail of success."

"My efforts," replied Sir Edmund, "to regain Jacqueline, have anticipated your friendly anxiety, though hitherto they have been ineffectual. The situation of the baron, from whom

I have thought it prudent to conceal her absence, obliged me to return; but several of the parties I despatched are still out, and I hope that their exertions will prove more fortunate."

"Heaven grant that they may!" exclaimed the marchioness. "It would be horrible indeed for Jacqueline to accept the hand still reeking with her brother's blood!"

"The particulars of that unhappy affair," said Sir Edmund, "I have been unable to collect; but from all that I have heard, the transactions of the last night seem strangely involved in mystery."

"The silence which the marquis, out of regard to his sister, maintained respecting his suspicions of the count's designs, has given them this appear-

ance," replied the marchioness. "To me alone they were confided, together with his intention of watching the motions of the count. I at first attempted to dissuade him from this hazardous project; but finding that impossible, I at length with difficulty prevailed on him to permit the Chevalier De Sombreuil to accompany him. Their protracted absence, and a slight noise in the garden, increased my uneasiness to a most painful height; and scarcely knowing what I did, I hastened to Jacqueline's apartment. She was not there, but you may easily imagine my surprise and dismay when I perceived the chevalier on the ground wounded and insensible. Half frantic with apprehension of the danger to which the marquis was exposed, I immediately dispersed the domestics in quest of him. After an interval which in my distracted state seemed an age, they

returned, bearing the marquis speechless and dying. His situation prevented him from giving any information of the count or Jacqueline, neither of whom had been seen; and though I directed the garden and grounds to be diligently searched, no tidings of them could be obtained.

"The opposition of the marquis and chevalier overcome, there remained no obstacle to prevent the execution of the count's plan: but that Jacqueline after these horrid scenes could persevere in her intention of accompanying him, excites in me, I must confess, both astonishment and pity. How dreadful will be her emotions when she awakes from the delusion into which his arts have lulled her!"

After a short pause the marchioness continued, "Snatch her from his fur-

ther machinations. It is not Jacqueline, but her possessions, which he covets. Preserve her, I conjure you, from the horror of espousing her brother's murderer, and avenge his death."

These words, and the energy with which the marchioness pronounced them, instead of exciting in Sir Edmund any suspicion of her motives, increased his compassion. To him her earnestness appeared the result of her affection for the marquis; and rendering her more interesting and worthy, gave her an additional claim to his esteem. Impressed with such sentiments, he endeavoured, by the consolations which sympathy and friendship afford, to mitigate her grief; while the marchioness listened with apparent concern and real negligence to all, except the expectation which he professed still

to entertain, that the measures adopted to regain Jacqueline would not be unavailing.

The noise and confusion which the flight of Jacqueline and the death of the marquis had occasioned in the chateau, rendered it impossible wholly to conceal the occurrences of the night from the baron. The absence of Jacqueline, since she had been confined to her apartment by the command of the marquis, had been represented to him to proceed from indisposition, and Sir Edmund judged it prudent to continue the deception.

The shock which the sudden and unexpected death of the marquis, though communicated with proper caution, produced in the baron, had nearly proved fatal. Neither the insolent threats, nor habitual neglect, of

the marquis had been able entirely to extinguish the extreme affection, or rather imprudent partiality, which during his infancy and before the bad traits in his disposition appeared the baron had entertained for him. To that injudicious partiality may principally be ascribed the crimes and follies which disgraced his subsequent years.

The return of Sir Edmund at this crisis was particularly fortunate. But for his presence and attentions the baron would have been unable to support this new affliction. To prevent his thoughts from dwelling on his loss, Sir Edmund sought to engage his attention by mentioning the Marquis Villena, especially as the expected arrival of that nobleman rendered it expedient to prepare the baron for his appearance. But the distant hints of Sir Edmund, for he did not imme-

diately venture a complete disclosure, produced an effect quite opposite to what he hoped or designed.

The baron, not entertaining the slightest idea that the Marquis Villena had survived their unfortunate encounter, started at his name, and regarding Sir Edmund with a look of grief, surprise, and indignation, exclaimed, "Is this a moment for such a subject? Do you conspire against my peace? But it is just," he added in a tone of anguish; "To his intreaties I was deaf, and heaven hears not mine." Sir Edmund, shocked by the misconstruction and distress of the baron, no longer hesitated to communicate the return of the marquis, conceiving that the knowledge of his safety would most speedily restore the baron's tranquillity.

In this opinion Sir Edmund was not

mistaken. The baron listened with astonishment, half doubting and scarcely daring to believe the pleasing intelligence; but when Sir Edmund, after relating the extreme anxiety of the marquis respecting Eloise, inquired whether she yet lived, the countenance of the baron changed, his melancholy returned, and he remained silently musing.

Sir Edmund observed with concern this alteration, and unable to decide whether it arose from sorrow or remorse, impatiently waited the answer of the baron to confirm or dissipate his apprehensions.

"To me," said the baron, "the fate of Eloise is unknown; for since that fatal evening when, stimulated by the representations of Sebastian, resentment usurped the place of reason, I have never beheld her. It was near the

close of that day, when Sebastian entered my presence in agitation. 'I am the messenger of news which will both astonish and afflict you,' said he. 'An accident has betrayed to me the cause of the melancholy which has lately oppressed Eloise.' My curiosity was instantly roused: expecting some painful secret, I listened in apprehension: but even thus prepared, it is not easy to conceive my distress and indignation when he declared that the Marquis Villena had seduced my sister.

"My friendship for the marquis and confidence in his honour were so great that this idea had never occurred. I had believed him incapable of an unworthy action, and therefore heard with repugnance such treacherous baseness attributed to him. It seemed to me impossible he could have acted thus, and I was about to express my incre-

dulity, and inquire on what authority this information rested, when Sebastian, as if he had divined my intention, prevented me by saying in a haughty reproachful tone, 'If what I have asserted require confirmation, it is readily obtained. The marquis has privately returned, and is now in the forest at the end of the grove waiting for an interview with Eloise.'

"I quitted the chateau, accompanied by Sebastian, and hastened to the forest. The recollection of his friendly professions, which I now ascribed to dissimulation, and of my credulous confidence in his honour, only served to augment my aversion and resentment; and these emotions were heightened by the insinuations of Sebastian.

"All that I had before felt was weak,

compared to the fury which seized me when I beheld the marquis. 'That is the spot,' said Sebastian, pointing between the trees. 'The marquis is punctual to his appointment.' I heard no more, but enraged beyond the power of forbearance, refused to listen to the explanation which the marquis repeatedly offered, declaring that nothing but his life could satisfy my injured honour.

"With the issue of our combat you are acquainted. The spectacle of the marquis wounded abated my resentment, and revived in some degree my former regard. I immediately approached him. Already insensible, he appeared to me on the point of expiring. I felt the keenest regret at having reduced him to such a state, and accused myself of inhumanity; for my intemperate passion had more

than once placed me in his power, but he generously avoided, in spite of my efforts to destroy him, taking advantage of those opportunities.

"I was now anxious to save the life which I had a little before so eagerly sought. As the phrenzy of passion subsided, my usual sentiments regained their influence, and I regretted to have acted with such precipitation. It was at this period, when, finding my efforts to relieve the marquis unavailing, I was anxious to procure assistance from the chateau, that I first perceived the absence of Sebastian.

"Surprised that he did not appear nor answer to my repeated calls, I quitted the marquis, and entered the adjoining thicket, whither I imagined he had retired; but the dangerous condition of the marquis, to whom delay

would be highly injurious, if not fatal, prevented my proceeding far, and induced me to return with as much speed as possible. It was during this interval, while I was in search of Sebastian, that the marquis must have been removed in the manner you have related; for on my return he was gone.

"The horror which seized me I cannot now recollect without emotion. For some minutes I remained gazing on the spot where he had fallen; overpowered by the dreadful supposition that in his defenceless condition he had become the victim of the wild animals which then infested the forest.

"In a state of mind which defies description I reached the chateau. The hope that perhaps Sebastian had

caused the marquis to be carried thither, alone preserved me from actual madness. Of the rest of that unfortunate night I have but a confused remembrance. Sebastian had left me, to return no more; and Eloise was lost. No persuasions could restrain me, and for many hours I traversed the forest wildly repeating the name of Eloise, or accusing myself as her murderer. That accusation, uttered in the delirium of despair, is I fear too true. To what extremity may not my barbarous violence have driven her? That she survives I have long ceased to hope, since in spite of the most diligent inquiries, no tidings of her could ever be obtained."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Darkling and desperate, with a staggering pace,
Of death afraid, and conscious of disgrace,
Fear, pride, remorse at once his heart assailed.

DRYDEN.

THE marchioness, apprehensive that the answers of De Sombreuil, should he be questioned, would invalidate the tale which she had fabricated respecting Jacqueline, resolved to lose no time in communicating it to him. She was also anxious to learn the particulars of his failure on the preceding night, and by whom he had been reduced to his present state.

Though the marchioness had so confidently asserted to Sir Edmund that

the marquis had lost his life in opposing the designs of the count, she was in fact wholly ignorant on that subject, and suffered no small degree of uneasiness and curiosity. Indeed the whole affair appeared to her mysterious and inexplicable. Her perplexity was increased by the recollection of the shadow which she had seen cross the end of the grove, and follow De Sombreuil, when he quitted her to execute the murder of Jacqueline. She dreaded that their conversation had been overheard, and her design betrayed; for the circumstance of some one being at that unfrequented place at such an hour, induced her to believe that her motions were watched. Who this person was, baffled conjecture. She had imagined it to be the count, till her subsequent interview with him convinced her that this suspicion was

erroneous. Once it occurred to her, that perhaps the marquis, having penetrated her intentions, had taken this method of resolving his doubts; but the situation in which he had been found, in a part of the garden very remote from the apartment of Jacqueline, and which it was wholly unnecessary for him to pass, had he pursued the steps of De Sombreuil, soon led her to relinquish this idea.

That the count after she parted from him had by some means become acquainted with the danger of Jacqueline, and forcibly rescued her from the power of De Sombreuil, appeared probable. His absence indeed seemed to confirm this conjecture; but even admitting its truth, she was unable to account for the manner in which the marquis had lost his life, since from his

uniform unqualified approbation of the count's suit, he was more likely to assist than to oppose him.

These considerations prevented the marchioness from coming to any conclusion, and kept her in continual agitation; for in proportion as there seemed less reason to believe that the person whom she had seen in the grove was neither the marquis nor count, her apprehensions and alarm augmented.

From De Sombreuil the marchioness expected a solution of this mystery, and she therefore heard with pleasure that his wound was less dangerous than had been at first imagined. Eager to have her doubts removed, and hoping that he would be able to give some information respecting Jacqueline, which might render Sir Edmund's endeavours

to regain her more speedy and effectual, she repaired to the apartment which Jacqueline had occupied; where, as it was not judged prudent to remove him, De Sombreuil still remained.

From his temporary insensibility De Sombreuil soon recovered, but not to the free use of his faculties. Corporeal pain, and the yet more acute mental anguish which he suffered, produced at intervals a slight delirium. During these paroxysms, when the restraint of reason seemed utterly lost, he had given language to his most secret thoughts. To his disturbed imagination the transactions of years long past were present. He spoke of and described scenes as if they actually existed; all his allusions bore the impression of realities. Such indeed they were. One event had darkened all his future days, and even his fan-

ciful wanderings partook of the gloomy and dreadful character which marked his usual deportment, while he reacted the most interesting but guilty scenes in which he had been engaged.

With terror the marchioness beheld the astonishment and suspicions which these disclosures excited in his attendants. Her own safety was deeply involved, and she trembled lest her design against Jacqueline should be revealed. The exclamations of De Sombreuil already alluded to some of the criminal parts of her conduct, and justified while they augmented her alarm. At present she was sensible that she had escaped detection, for from the account given to her it was easy to perceive that the application to her of many passages was wholly unsuspected.

With affected pity the marchioness approached De Sombreuil, expecting that her voice and presence would recall him to recollection, and compose the tumult of his mind. He gazed on her for a short time in silence, and she began to hope that her endeavours would be successful, when with a furious gesture he said, "Who shall suspect us? I will conceal the body from all Venice. Night is our friend: the very stars are hooded. Where is my dagger? Jacqueline escaped me then, but I have her now. There, your wishes are accomplished."

Shocked, terrified, and enraged, the marchioness withdrew; but not till she had sought to excuse, and in some degree account for the expressions of De Sombreuil, by attributing them to his concern for Jacqueline's impru-

dence, and his anxious wish to prevent her leaving the chateau. Unable to communicate to De Sombreuil the part which she had assigned to him in her feigned recital to Sir Edmund, she briefly intimated it to the attendants, with the double design of inducing them to fix a less dangerous interpretation on the exclamations of De Sombreuil, and if Sir Edmund should make any inquiries with respect to the strange circumstance of De Sombreuil's being found in the oratory, that they might be provided with answers, to corroborate her former assertions.

Before them the marchioness concealed her perturbation, or at least suffered no more to appear than might naturally be supposed to arise from compassion: but returned to her own apartment, and freed from every re-

straint, she gave full indulgence to the dark malignant emotions which she had till then with difficulty restrained.

Towards De Sombreuil her resentment, not mitigated by pity or sympathy for his deplorable condition, was unbounded. The idea of the danger to which his unconscious exclamations exposed her, extinguished humanity; and had his destruction depended on her wishes, his fate would have been as summary as violent.

But wishes alone were useless; and the first transports of indignation had no sooner passed, and the wild desire of revenge become so much subdued as to admit of reflection, than she collected her scattered thoughts to devise some plan which should at once accomplish vengeance and insure her

safety. Upon De Sombreuil's death her life seemed grafted: while he existed she could never be secure.

The almost insurmountable difficulties which opposed any design against the life of De Sombreuil, instead of checking the marchioness, were rather an additional stimulus. That the object whom she both feared and hated was placed beyond the reach of her vengeance, gave additional energy to the eagerness with which she sought to gratify it.

Many hours elapsed before she could come to any resolution, though her intentions remained the same. So far from being changed, they were strengthened, by the intelligence that most of the parties despatched in quest of Jacqueline were returned without being

able to obtain the smallest tidings of her.

Evening came, and the plans of the marchioness were still unmatured. She had more than once projected, but never witnessed, much less executed, a murder; and she shrunk with involuntary horror from the thought of beholding the agonies of death. But in this case there was no alternative. If De Sombreuil died, it must be by her hand. There was none to whom she could communicate her wishes, and she was then experiencing too acutely the miseries of confederacy in guilt to hazard them again.

The marchioness waited till she supposed that the household were retired, and it was therefore late before she could attempt the perpetration of her

atrocious design. Apprehensive that a light might betray her, she left the taper in the anteroom, and by the feeble rays of an almost obscured moon explored her way along the corridor into which her apartment opened. She had nearly reached the top of the staircase, when the horn at the gate of the chateau was suddenly sounded.

Joy thrilled her agitated frame. For an instant she hoped and believed that it was the signal of Jacqueline's return; and breathless with impatience and the variety of her emotions, she hurried to a window which overlooked the entrance to the chateau.

From a carriage two men descended; but with disappointment the marchioness perceived that neither was the count. In one she thought that she recognized father Osborne whom she

had frequently seen at Fitzbaynham castle. In this opinion she was not mistaking: it was indeed Osborne and the Marquis Villena who had arrived.

Obliged to suspend her intention, the marchioness returned to her apartment. For some time she feared that it would be necessary to relinquish it entirely for that night. But as the bustle which the reception of the marquis had occasioned, was soon over, she resolved not to hazard her security by delay.

During this interval she had remained at one of the windows, expecting that the freshness of the air would relieve the feverish heat which oppressed her, and with a careless eye gazed on the beautiful scene before her. To her distempered mind the calm serenity of

nature conveyed no pleasure, but rather by its striking contrast with the turbulence and anarchy of her feelings augmented her misery. The slave of passion, innocence and peace had long ceased to charm her; and she turned with vexation and remorse from the view of those brilliant orbs, which, sullied by crimes, she could never hope to inhabit. A conviction of her guilt, and a strong sense of the superior happiness which she had forfeited, only plunged her deeper into vice; and banishing the softer emotions, rendered her heart more callous and depraved.

With caution she opened the door, and proceeded along the corridor. At the end she stopped to listen. All in the body of the mansion was profoundly still; but at intervals faint sounds of merriment reached her.

These were too distant and imperfect for her immediately to distinguish whence they proceeded; but few minutes were sufficient for her to ascertain that they rose from the wing appropriated to the domestics.

The marchioness quickly conjectured the cause of this unexpected noise, which in fact was occasioned by the hearty but boisterous welcome given to the attendants who had arrived with the Marquis Villena, and which, instead of preventing, she considered favourable to her designs. While their attention was thus engaged, there was less danger of observation.

To avoid the most frequented parts of the chateau, she determined to pass through the garden, and enter De Sombreuil's apartment by the oratory.

With this intent, having hastily descended the staircase, she quitted the hall, and entered a long gallery terminated by the saloon which opened to the garden.

Undismayed by the darkness and silence which surrounded her, the marchioness proceeded rapidly. She unclosed the folding doors of the saloon, and advanced some steps, before she perceived that the windows were partly open. The faint shadowy light which they admitted was sufficient to reveal to her a spectacle never beheld without emotion, but which, wholly unexpected and seen at such a time, and under such circumstances, produced a sensation of horror she had never before experienced.

In the centre of the room, on a table covered with black velvet, rested a

bier containing the body of the late marquis. Unprepared to encounter the solemn emblems of death, the marchioness, appalled, remained unable to move. Her eyes were fixed on the awful receptacle, nor had she power to withdraw them. Her intended crime seemed realized, and she was suddenly brought to witness its dismal result. In this scene there was nothing new or uncommon, nothing which she did not before know must follow the accomplishment of her design. Of death she had been thinking, but not of its consequences. She had thought only of removing De Sombreuil from existence, not of the state to which she consigned him.

A cloud for some minutes obscured the moon, and left the marchioness in almost profound darkness. Faint and trembling, she gasped for breath. Ter-

rific images floated before her sight; the room appeared to shake beneath her feet; mysterious whispers, mingled with lamentations, met her affrighted ears, while in a hollow voice, which seemed to issue from the bier, she heard her name pronounced.

She could endure no more. Excess of horror restored her strength; and with a speed almost supernatural she fled into the garden. Many minutes elapsed before she could overcome the effects of her alarm, or regain composure; but the impression of the preceding scene was not sufficiently powerful to deter her from executing her former resolution. It even in some degree contributed to urge its fulfilment. By rendering her more sensible of the value of existence, she felt less reluctance to adopt any measures which could insure her safety.

Provoked by the weakness into which she had been surprised, and the delay which it had occasioned, the marchioness approached the oratory, and with cautious silence entered. The curtain which separated the apartments was undrawn, and the feeble rays of a lamp burning on a table in a distant part of the chamber enabled her to discern the situation of De Sombreuil without exposing her to observation.

She could not have chosen a moment more favourable; for the two attendants to whose care he had been left during the night, attracted by the pleasure which they heard their companions enjoying, and trusting to the continuance of the slumber into which De Sombreuil had shortly before fallen, ventured to leave him; intending as soon as they had learned the occasion of these unusual sounds to return. The

superstitious fear with which the household still regarded these rooms, rendered it impossible for either to remain alone.

Tortured by reflection, and hoping that change of place would afford some mitigation of his suffering, De Sombreuil had, in spite of the intreaties and remonstrances of his attendants, persisted in leaving his couch. In his expectations of relief he had not been entirely deceived; for to the fatigue occasioned by rising he was indebted to his present tranquil sleep.

With noiseless steps the marchioness approached the sopha on which he was lying, and drew from beneath her robe a dagger. As she raised it, the light reflected from its polished blade, flashed on his countenance; which pale and ghastly, thus transiently revealed

seemed still more shocking and impressive. He moved, and the small degree of pity which his altered appearance had kindled was quickly extinguished by the fear of his waking. A sense of her own danger nerved the arm of the marchioness, as with unsparing violence she plunged the dagger into his bosom.

She had aimed at his heart, but striking against a rib, the weapon glanced aside, and the wound, though deep and severe, was not immediately mortal. He groaned, and writhed with agony, as shuddering at her own cruelty she hastily withdrew the weapon, and turned to quit the apartment. But before she had time to move, De Sombreuil suddenly raised himself, and, grasping her arm, sought to wrest the dagger from her. Shocked and terrified, it was not immediately that she

could disengage herself; and perhaps her efforts would have been unavailing, had not excess of pain compelled him to relinquish his hold. He sunk on the sopha; and the marchioness, believing him dead, rushed with precipitation from the oratory, and continued her rapid course till she reached the entrance of the saloon. Here she paused, reluctant to encounter the terrors which she had before experienced. Of the importance of immediately returning, before the situation of De Sombreuil was discovered, she was sensible; but her resolution, nearly subdued by the recent scene, rendered her unable to support new trials.

She was yet hesitating, when from the shrubbery on the opposite side of the lawn she perceived a person issue, and slowly advance in a direction towards the place where she was standing.

Her indecision was at an end. The imaginary fears which had restrained her from entering the saloon, were lost in the extreme alarm which the supposition that she had been watched occasioned; and anxious only to escape detection, she ventured to cross the saloon; whence hurrying through the galleries with as much celerity as the darkness would permit, she at length unmolested gained her apartment. Hastily seizing the taper, which was still burning where she had left it, she passed on to her dressing-room, and overpowered by guilt, terror, and fatigue, sunk, almost fainting, on a seat.

Relieved from the immediate apprehension of detection, the marchioness felt more acutely the miseries of her situation. The crime which with so much hazard she had perpetrated, in

stead of lessening them, had opened a fresh source of uneasiness. Perhaps she had only freed herself from De Sombreuil to meet more certain disgrace.

Her spirits, hitherto supported by action, were unable to sustain solitude or reflection; and as the fever of revenge subsided, she experienced a guilty and anxious depression. Her mind, reduced to a state of unusual weakness, could not resist the superstitious terrors which assailed her. As she looked round the apartment, faintly illumined by the single taper, she almost imagined that she discerned dusky shadows moving in the distant obscurity.

The unbroken silence appeared to her dreadful, and augmented the gloomy fancies which in spite of her

efforts haunted all her thoughts. Wherever her eyes rested she beheld the countenance of De Sombreuil pale and haggard. More than once she was on the point of calling her principal attendant who slept in an adjoining room; but the risk of discovery which her agitation and the circumstance of her not having retired at so late an hour would involve, withheld her from seeking this consolation.

Many minutes, which to her seemed as so many hours, had not elapsed, when, with emotions impossible to be described, she heard the door of the anteroom opened, and some person enter. That she had been followed was no longer doubtful; and before she could come to a decision how to act, the steps were already in the room.

With apprehension and dismay the marchioness raised her eyes; but what an object met them! De Sombreuil, pale, bloody, his features distorted by pain and rage, was advancing towards her with the fury of a demon. Uttering a piercing shriek, she started from her seat, and attempted to leave the room; but dropped down senseless before she had proceeded many steps.

Her cries brought Sir Edmund and the Marquis Villena, to her assistance, in time to prevent De Sombreuil from inflicting the punishment which he designed, and which her crimes merited. It was not without difficulty that she was rescued from his grasp; and still insensible, she was by Sir Edmund's orders borne from the apartment.

Indignation at the mean treachery

of the marchioness had enabled De Sombreuil to follow her with the intention of taking ample vengeance; but exhausted by this effort, and faint through pain and loss of blood, his strength failed, and he would have fallen had not the Marquis Villena supported him to a sopha.

The usual remedies soon restored him; and Sir Edmund, with the marquis, was about to leave the room, when De Sombreuil, who had been some time attentively observing the marquis, exclaimed, "Is it possible that you still exist; or is it only a dream to mock my hopes? But I cannot be mistaking. Those features! What days of bliss and misery do they revive! Do you remember Eloise?"

At that name the marquis, who, supposing it to proceed from delirium,

had paid little attention to the former part of De Sombreuil's speech, stopped, and regarding him earnestly, with considerable emotion conjured him, if he knew any particulars of Eloise, not to delay imparting them.

"Your agitation," replied De Sombreuil, "is sufficient testimony that she is still dear to you. Yes," he added; "your wishes and my revenge shall at once be gratified. I know and will reveal her fate. Approach; your groans shall be my dying requiem. In death at least I shall triumph."

The wildness with which De Sombreuil spoke, his strange discourse, and the fury which flashed from his hollow eyes, seemed to indicate that his senses were still disordered. Under this impression Sir Edmund, in pity to the marquis's feelings, endea-

voured to prevail on him to retire; but the strong interest which the latter felt in all connected with Eloise forced him to remain.

Sir Edmund's opinion of the situation of De Sombreuil was not altogether erroneous. Though not delirious, his mind was in a state when the passions usurp an uncontrouled dominion. The fever which raged in his veins, while it destroyed life, elevated his thoughts, and rendered his perceptions more vivid, his sensibility more acute. The unexpected sight of the Marquis Villena had concentrated his passions into one: and with all the energy habitual to his character, he devoted himself to its gratification.

The hope of at last accomplishing his revenge, and inflicting on the marquis endless grief, enabled him to

struggle with his weakness, while amid the pangs of dissolution he briefly disclosed the destiny of Eloise. "I am Sebastian," he exclaimed. But as the frequent pauses which his situation rendered necessary, and the interruptions of the marquis, confused this recital, it will perhaps be more intelligible in a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

And more he would have said; and more he spoke,
Which sounded like a clamour in a vault
That could not be distinguished.

SHAKESPEAR.

SEBASTIAN was the son of one of the baron's vassals, who had perished in battle, preserving the life of his lord at the expense of his own. This circumstance rendered Sebastian at once an object of pity and gratitude, and procured for him the particular notice and patronage of the baron's family.

During the early years of his residence at the castle, Sebastian enjoyed

unqualified happiness; but unconscious of the danger to which he was exposed, he then imbibed the fatal passion which consigned the remainder of his life to wretchedness and guilt. To the amiable Eloise, the associate of his infancy and youth, his heart became irrevocably devoted.

Sensible that the disparity of his rank prevented every present hope of success, the natural haughtiness of his disposition prompted him to confine to his own bosom this unfortunate attachment, and led him to embrace the military profession.

Resolved to perish or attain distinction which should entitle him to aspire to the hand of Eloise, regardless of death, in every danger he was foremost; and his desperate valour soon procured him the honour of knight-

hood. His career was brilliant, but short; for he had not long entered the path to glory, before the unfortunate incidents of his life compelled him to renounce the pursuit.

Three years had nearly passed, but neither absence nor the active scenes in which he was engaged abated his love. The celebrity which he had deservedly obtained, by flattering his hopes, served rather to augment it.

Such was the state of his mind, when he received from the baron, who on his marriage had quitted the camp, a most pressing invitation to join him at the chateau. For some time Sebastian declined his solicitations; but at length his strong desire of again beholding Eloise overcame prudence, and induced him to comply with the baron's reiterated intreaties.

Sebastian had not been long at the chateau before he suspected that the Marquis Villena was a favoured rival. This idea once suggested, it was impossible to elude his vigilance; and he quickly discovered the private meetings of the marquis and Eloise, whose marriage had taken place before his arrival.

Though irritated by the frequent intrusion of Sebastian, which could not be attributed wholly to chance, the marquis, ignorant of his affection for Eloise, thought himself compelled to admit him to his confidence, and to reveal a secret which consistently with the honour of Eloise he perceived could no longer be concealed from him.

With emotions impossible to be described Sebastian listened. To destroy the marquis was the first impulse of

despair and rage; but a moment's reflection induced him to abandon this design for one which promised more fully to accomplish his revenge, and render the baron subservient to his future views.

The journey of the marquis to Spain, and his private return, presented Sebastian with the opportunity which he eagerly sought. He denounced the marquis to the baron as the seducer of his sister; and having by artful insinuations raised his resentment to a pitch which nothing but the death of the marquis could appease, he conducted him to the forest, where, in expectation of an interview with Eloise, the marquis waited.

Sebastian did not stay to see the issue of their combat, but hastened to Eloise in the banqueting-house; and

under pretence of conducting her to the marquis, prevailed on her to accompany him to a distant part of the forest, where a carriage was stationed in which she was conveyed to a subterranean dwelling belonging to a party of desperadoes whom he had engaged.

It had been his intention to compel Eloise to an immediate marriage; and he trusted that the knowledge possessed by him alone of the baron's contest with the marquis, which admitted of being represented in a manner fatal to his honour if not his life, would constrain him to suppress his resentment: and it was with this view that he had made him, the instrument of his vengeance on the marquis.

Death defeated the schemes of Sebastian at the period when he expected

to accomplish them: for Eloise, unable to support the shock which she experienced on learning that the marquis had fallen by the hand of the baron, lived only to give birth to a son. The hour in which she imparted life to another, she resigned her own.

To the care of the ecclesiastic admitted to her in her last moments Eloise bequeathed her son; and apprehensive that Sebastian would transfer to him the hatred which he had avowed towards the marquis, she obtained a solemn promise that he should be immediately removed beyond the power of Sebastian, and his future destination be entirely concealed from him.

Regard for the baron induced her not to reveal the name of her family; and she requested that if the marquis

was no more, her son should not be acquainted with his descent till the death of the friar; as his clandestine birth, and the prejudices of his grandfather, rendered it improbable that he would ever be acknowledged.

Overcome by the sudden and unexpected annihilation of his hopes, Sebastian found refuge in insanity. Many years passed of which he retained scarcely any recollection; so monotonous and invariably wretched, that like a stream they moved on unmarked, without beginning and without end. To wander in the grounds of the chateau, and visit the apartments which had belonged to Eloise, were his sole occupations, the only purpose for which he existed.

The banqueting-house, her favourite re'ort, received her ashes; and on her

tomb he passed whole nights, alternately the victim of remorse, rage, and grief. The superstitious terrors of the domestics left in the chateau, secured him from molestation. The places which he usually frequented were shunned; and free from interruption, he indulged the deep and incurable melancholy which consumed him.

Time, or a gradual change in his constitution, at length produced some lucid intervals; and these, the train of gloomy thoughts which had engaged his attention once broken, soon became more frequent and of greater duration.

His grief was no longer pure and unmingled with other passions. With memory returned the recollection of his wrongs and the desire of revenge. He regretted that he had not detained

the infant; and considering him, however innocently, the cause of his affliction, his aversion was increased, and he became eager to inflict on him a vengeance proportioned to the pangs which he had so long endured. Impressed with this idea, but without any settled plan, he passed over to England, whither the infant had been carried.

Father Anselm, to whose care he had been consigned, happened at the period of his birth to be travelling through Guienne. Sebastian, acquainted with this circumstance, and thinking him least likely to betray his designs, employed persons to seize and conduct the friar to the retreat to which Eloise had been conveyed, for the purpose of celebrating their nuptials.

Father Anselm arrived only in time to give Eloise the parting benediction, and receive from her hands her infant son. Except the few particulars which she communicated, he was ignorant of all that related to his young charge, and even of the name of Sebastian.

Seventeen years had nearly elapsed from that period, when Sebastian reached the monastery to which father Anselm belonged. It was a solemn festival; and finding it impossible to obtain an interview with the friar till the evening, he joined the company who were assembled in the church. There, in the habit of a novice, he beheld a youth, whose strong resemblance to the Marquis Villena immediately convinced him that he was the object whom he sought. Scarcely could Sebastian suppress the furious passions

which his presence rekindled. All his injuries seemed renewed. In him the marquis again existed; and his wishes to destroy him became more ardent and confirmed.

The tale which Sebastian had formed to deceive father Anselm, did not produce the effect which he expected; and in spite of his artful representations and splendid promises, the friar remained inflexibly determined to fulfil his promise to Eloise.

Provoked by this resolution, which he found it impossible to alter, Sebastian threatened to appeal to the superior on the following morning. The manner in which Anselm received this intimation induced him to believe that he would adopt some plan to frustrate it; and suspecting that his intended victim might attempt to elude his

vengeance by quitting the monastery, he remained in the vicinity.

His conjectures were verified. At midnight he beheld him, accompanied by another person, depart. The remainder of that night and the next day he followed them, without finding an opportunity to execute his sanguinary designs. But the succeeding evening, benighted on the borders of an extensive forest, they were compelled to take shelter in a ruined castle.

Than this place, with which he was well acquainted, they could not have chosen any more favourable to his views. This dilapidated building was the resort of desperadoes who once in each month assembled there. As this night happened to be one of their periodical meetings, Sebastian waited till they separated before he attempted

to accomplish his purpose. During this interval, regardless of the inclemency of the weather, he remained some time contemplating through an unclosed window the object of his hatred; and at length with exultation beheld him conducted to a remote apartment.

The moment for vengeance was arrived. Sebastian approached the couch, and twice plunged into it his dagger charged with eternal sleep. Revenge was gratified; but a desire once more to behold his victim induced him shortly to return. On approaching the room, a noise at the opposite entrance attracted his attention; and concluding that he had been watched, he hastily followed, to detect the intruder: but the intricacies of the building baffled his pursuit.

The absence of Sebastian from the chateau, and change of scene, had abated his grief, and in some degree revived his former emotions. He no longer shunned society, but sought in the tumult of dissipation to banish remembrance. His prospects in life were destroyed, and with them his virtue. For three years he wandered through the principal cities of Italy, vainly seeking to flee from himself, and mingling with associates equally abandoned.

At Venice his acquaintance with Count Cajetan and the marchioness commenced, under the assumed name of De Sombreuil. His sagacious and decisive character quickly recommended him to her notice, and he became the confidant and assistant in her atrocious designs. The murder which he

had there committed, as she imagined, at her instigation, he had in fact long intended, and delayed only for want of a proper opportunity. Some expressions uttered by that unfortunate nobleman, though they did not admit of being publicly noticed, had rendered Sebastian his determined enemy, and he therefore gladly promoted the vindictive plans of the marchioness.

In the midst of the guilty pleasures in which Sebastian mingled, he had never forgotten Eloise. Often the recollection of that happy period, when he had indulged the hope of rendering himself worthy of aspiring to her, rose in sad contrast with his present degradation, and nearly renewed the delirium which had followed her loss.

It was in one of these gloomy fits

that he was introduced to Lord Richard, then in Italy. His gaiety and undisturbed prosperity seemed to Sebastian to insult his wretchedness; while the strong resemblance which he bore to the baron forcibly recalled the remembrance of years long past, of happiness irrevocably lost. He thought of what he was, and what he had been. The pride of the baron had formed the first obstacle to his hopes, and he resolved that he should at least participate the misery of which he was the primary cause. The revenge which for want of an object had lain dormant, was revived; justice, and the feeble ties of their former friendship, yielded to the tide of passion; and with an impetuosity which scarcely submitted to the restraints of reason, Sebastian applied himself to accomplish his newly devised schemes.

With this view he readily concurred in the count's wishes; and it was principally by exerting the influence, and indeed authority, which his knowledge of her crimes gave him over the marchioness, that they had compelled her to accept the suit of Lord Richard. Sebastian foresaw that her conduct would render this alliance unhappy and disgraceful.

In Lord Richard he found a mind prepared to receive with avidity his insidious advice. His evil qualities, hitherto repressed by fear, wanted only encouragement, and promised under the skilful culture of Sebastian a luxuriant growth; but before he had proceeded far in this infamous plan, his attention was diverted to another channel, by hearing Lord Richard relate the history of Sir Almeric De St. Amand.

To describe the emotions of Sebastian while listening to this narrative, is impossible. In this knight so celebrated he recognized the son of his rival, and learned with unspeakable astonishment and rage, that his vengeance had been eluded. The most implacable hatred seized his mind; and immediately quitting Italy he hurried over to England.

Educated in Fitzbaynham castle, he was well acquainted with every part of it. Availing himself of this knowledge, he entered by the private gate, attended by an associate on whom he could depend; and through a secret passage reached the apartment of Sir Almeric, who did not observe their approach till too late to make a successful resistance.

Sebastian conveyed Sir Almeric to

the ruined castle where he had before attempted his life. Here disguised in the dress in which he usually appeared at the chateau, he partially revealed to him the fate of his parents, and in the character of their friend endeavoured to extort from him an oath to avenge their wrongs.

Alone, childless, forsaken by all the world, Sebastian could not behold without envy the different situation of the baron. He no longer sought the life of Sir Almeric; his mind now embraced a more comprehensive plan of revenge, and he reserved Sir Almeric to be the instrument of his yet unmatured designs.

Before Sebastian had finally arranged his diabolical projects, his interview with the marchioness at Fitzbaynham

castle took place. Her jealousy of Jacqueline placed the happiness of the baron more completely in his power. Though long practised in deception, he could scarcely repress the pleasure with which he listened to this communication. He approved of her intentions, and zealously undertook to execute them.

On the night when he secretly conveyed Jacqueline from her father's residence, he had, unknown to the marchioness, carried her to the ruined castle where Sir Almeric was confined. This device had the effect which he expected. As the price of her safety, Sir Almeric took the required oath; and having succeeded in this design, immediately proceeded with her to the appointed place.

The words and other sounds which

had so much terrified Jacqueline, while left by Sebastian in the gallery of the ruined castle, proceeded from the man who had assisted in the removal of Sir Almeric. Less skilled than Sebastian in the difficulty of the descent, he had been precipitated from a considerable height, and was then suffering under the delirium of a fever produced by the violence of his bruises.

During the supper at the marquis's, Sebastian, placed opposite to Jacqueline, had an opportunity of more particularly observing her. In her countenance she resembled the baroness, but her manners frequently reminded him of Eloise. His attention was irresistibly engaged, and with melancholy pleasure he continued to gaze on her, till the reiterated intreaties of the marchioness and count compelled her

to sing. The Spanish ballad which on account of its simplicity she selected, had been the favourite of Eloise, and her voice and style of execution were similar. In an agony of grief Sebastian listened. An incident so wholly unexpected, and which so forcibly recalled the past, subdued his fortitude, and he fled to solitude to indulge unseen his wild and extravagant emotions.

His love for Eloise, which a succession of interesting events had abated, revived with all its former violence; and withdrawing from the pursuit made after Jacqueline and Blanche, he hurried to Guienne, and with frantic eagerness sought her tomb. His former malady partly returned; he viewed things with an infected eye, which, magnifying his misfortunes

and injuries, increased in proportion his desire of revenge.

Such was the state of Sebastian's mind when the baron arrived at the chateau. The lights and trampling of horses which had so much alarmed the drivers in the forest, proceeded from a funeral procession moving towards a monastery situated on the opposite border. The figure which they saw indistinctly among the trees, was Sebastian wandering there in a gloomy reverie; and it was he, who, overhearing the exclamations of the baron, had from the adjoining thicket replied to them. With savage exultation he considered the moment of accomplishing his schemes near; and Sir Almeric was immediately removed from England to the subterranean

abode in which Eloise had given him birth.

The mystery and obscurity which Sebastian studiously preserved respecting himself and his motives, excited the suspicion of Sir Almeric, and increased his anxiety to regain his liberty; but the vigilance with which he was guarded rendered all his efforts vain.

On the evening when prompted by curiosity Jacqueline visited the banqueting-house, Sebastian had brought Sir Almeric to the tomb of Eloise, expecting that that solemn spectacle would animate him to seek revenge. It was his intention privately to introduce Sir Almeric into the apartment of the baron that night, and representing

him as the murderer of his parents, to instigate him to stab him as he slept.

The horror and resentment expressed by Sir Almeric, and his determined refusal to acquiesce in this base proposal, raised the hatred of Sebastian to the highest degree. He rushed from the banqueting-house, and in an unfrequented part of the forest, in an ungovernable transport of fury, plunged his dagger into the bosom of the knight. Still reeking with the blood of his unfortunate victim, Sebastian repaired to the chateau, and announced to the baron and Jacqueline at once the death and consanguinity of Sir Almeric.

On the day following the arrival of the marchioness, under the name of

De Sombreuil he openly joined her at the château; and his insinuations contributed to stimulate her jealousy, and at length urged her to determine on the death of Jacqueline.

Foiled in this attempt, repining disappointment had augmented the ill effects of his wound, and principally contributed to produce his delirium. Revenge seemed snatched from his grasp; when the unexpected appearance of the Marquis Villena roused him from despair. In his last moments he triumphed over his rival, and in the view of his miseries forgot his own.

With resolute composure he rejected all assistance. The purpose for which he had wished to live was accomplished, and he no longer shunned death.

The firmness with which he sustained the pains of dissolution would have excited both pity and admiration, had it appeared in a less criminal character. That power and pride of mind, which enabled him to support this trying period, and which under more favourable circumstances would have rendered him great and estimable, had been a leading cause of his calamities.

Conscious that his capacity rendered him worthy of a more exalted station, he spurned his abject lot; and love mingling with ambition, he had early raised his daring hopes to scenes of glory and renown: but supplanted in his affection, his prospects blighted, the energy of his character concentered in revenge.

With exultation he beheld the affliction of the marquis, who, struggling with his emotions, listened in trembling agitation, till the death of Sir Almeric, destroying all his hopes, wholly subdued his fortitude; and he was borne insensible from the apartment.

The baron had some time joined the marquis and Sir Edmund. In spite of his resentment he could not avoid sympathizing with the sufferings of Sebastian; and moved by the recollection of their former friendship, he approached to offer him consolation and forgiveness.

But Sebastian, provoked and humiliated to be considered an object of compassion, rejected with disdain these

amicable overtures; and collecting his little remaining strength, disclosed to the astonished baron the characters of the marchioness and count, and their atrocious designs against Jacqueline. To render the anguish of the baron more poignant, with refined cruelty he communicated the depravity and worthlessness of his son, the late Marquis Omfredo, with whose recent death Sebastian was unacquainted.

In this catalogue of crimes and errors most painful to a parent's ear, perhaps the learning that it was the marquis who had secreted the packet bequeathed by the baroness to the care of Jacqueline was not the least distressing.

This manuscript, written a short time before his death by the former

confessor of the baroness at her express desire, contained a brief statement of the mysterious transactions which had taken place at the chateau, together with the friar's attestation of its truth and authenticity. The baroness, considering this paper of the utmost importance should any investigation into the baron's conduct be instituted, had given such strict injunctions respecting it.

The anxiety which she manifested about this packet excited the curiosity of the marquis, more particularly as he conjectured that it related to the melancholy and mysterious conduct of the baron; and he resolved, if possible, to obtain it. During the first transports of Jacqueline's grief, he unobserved removed the key of the cabinet, and having executed his design, he

dextrously restored it before it had been missed.

Devoid of affection and generosity, the marquis did not scruple to employ the influence which the possession of this secret gave him over the baron; and with unfeeling insolence obliged him to acquiesce in measures repugnant to his wishes. Exulting in the success of this base expedient, and wholly deceived by the ingratiating arts of Sebastian, in a moment of weak confidence the marquis boasted of his power over the baron, and incautiously mentioned the manner in which he had obtained it.

Before Sebastian, bent on the destruction of Sir Almeric, so precipitately quitted Italy, he contrived, unknown to the marquis, to secure the

packet, and to increase the uneasiness and perplexity of the baron, he left the envelope in the apartment of Sir Almeric on the night of his removal from Fitzbaynham castle.

The weakness of Sebastian rapidly increased, but his firmness remained unshaken, and in broken accents he continued to declare his satisfaction at the completion of his revenge. As he regarded the baron, his eyes once more resumed their former brilliancy, his countenance its usual stern expression, and softly pronouncing the name of Eloise, he expired.

The extreme agitation and alarm which the marchioness had undergone, rendered it long before she could be restored to her senses. The replies which she received to her eager in-

quiries respecting Sebastian were not calculated to remove her uneasiness. The animosity which he had already testified was sufficient evidence, that in her attempt on his life he had discovered her; and knowing his character, she dreaded that he would reveal both this and her former atrocities.

Uncertain what course to pursue in this difficulty, for which she was wholly unprepared, the marchioness was meditating and endeavouring to devise some means of eluding the publicity and punishment of her crimes, when the confidential attendant of the count, who had assisted in the removal of Blanche, arrived at the chateau, and requested an audience of her.

The spirits of the marchioness revived. She began to hope that her suspicions respecting the cause of the count's absence were groundless. If his affection was still hers, she might yet be happy. With him she would withdraw far from the scenes of her guilt, and blest with his society in some elegant retreat, realize the delightful visions on which her imagination often dwelt.

Little anticipating the fatal news of which this man was the bearer, the marchioness received, with an anguish rendered more bitter by the pleasing expectations which she had been indulging, the intelligence of the count's death.

For some time she remained ab-

sorbed in profound affliction. Of all human beings the count alone had been able to touch her insensible heart. Towards him alone it vibrated with sympathy; and violent in all her passions, her grief for his loss was extreme.

Yet her fortitude survived the wreck of all her prospects; and the first uncontrolable emotions of sorrow past, she opposed to this unexpected calamity the courage of despair, and in proportion as it was great and irreparable she seemed to gather power to indure it. She even attained sufficient composure to inquire the particulars of the count's death.

Emboldened by security, the marchioness and count had become less cautious in their conduct, and at last

excited the suspicion of the marquis. Suspense to his temper was insupportable, and his jealousy once awakened, he sought an immediate opportunity of confirming or refuting it.

His patience was not put to a severe trial. He observed the marchioness quit the chateau on the night of her conference with Sebastian in the forest, and soon after, perceiving the count enter the cedar walk, he had, concealed by the darkness, followed him at a short distance.

To the undesigned and indeed mutually unwished interview which took place between the marchioness and count, he was witness. He heard the protestations of the count, and with eager attention listened to his vows of eternal affection, and his allu-

sions to the early period of their love.

His dishonour could no longer be doubted. He saw himself the dupe of their artifices. Offended pride, no less than injured love, urged him to take immediate vengeance. The marchioness had no sooner retired to the chateau, than he presented himself to the astonished count, and demanded instant satisfaction.

The count surprised and vexed by the appearance and address of the marquis, so inimical to the designs which he meditated, sought to remove his suspicions by pleading his attachment to Jacqueline; but this attempt only served to augment the rage of the marquis, and the count

was reluctantly compelled to draw in his defence.

At first he contented himself by acting on the defensive, unwilling by imbruing his hands in the blood of the marquis to place an insurmountable obstacle to his union with Jacqueline. But the fury with which the marquis continued to press him, and the numerous wounds which he had received, at length provoked the count beyond the power of forbearance.

The contest was supported on either side with desperate ferocity, nor did it terminate till both were mortally wounded. A violent thrust from the count took effect in the side of the marquis; he groaned and sunk insensible to the ground.

The count, in a condition little better, staggered a few paces; but faint with loss of blood, his limbs could no longer sustain him, and he was on the point of falling, when his attendant, who had just arrived, caught him in his arms.

Shocked by the state in which he found his lord, he would have hastened to the chateau for assistance, had he not been withheld by the peremptory orders of the count, whose weakness increased too rapidly to allow him to intimate his farther intentions. His attendant, uncertain what were his wishes, and not daring to apply at the chateau after his strict injunction to the contrary, with difficulty supported him to the house which he had left near the private gate of the garden at which he had entered. But they

had not proceeded far, before the motion, becoming insupportable to the count, obliged them to stop at a cottage on the border of the forest.

Medical assistance was immediately procured, but the utmost efforts of art could afford only trifling and temporary relief. Excess of pain soon deprived the count of his senses, and he lingered in great agony till the following evening, when he expired. As his condition had rendered him incapable of giving any directions, his attendant, shortly after his decease, repaired to the chateau to communicate his fate to the marchioness, who he knew was his distant relation.

The sorrow of the marchioness was augmented by the answers which she received to her inquiries respecting

Jacqueline. She learned, with no small surprise, that, instead of the count's having been the projector of her removal, some words which he had uttered in a short interval of sanity proved that he was even unacquainted with that event.

Her jealous suspicions thus entirely banished, she more poignantly deplored her loss. Without the count the whole world appeared to her a cheerless desart. The scenes of happiness which she hoped to have realized with him, flitted, like phantoms never to be grasped, across her imagination; while contrasted with them, the future appeared more dreary and insupportable.

It was impossible that the marchioness could so deeply lament the

count, without entertaining resentment against the author of his death. Towards the marquis she had always felt aversion; but his memory, since she learned that the count had fallen by his hand, became odious. Her hatred extended to his family; she loathed all connected with him: their intercourse, even their presence, would be intolerable, and she resolved to withdraw from them for ever.

To this determination the marchioness was urged, not more by grief and indignation than by pride and fear. Were Sebastian to betray her confidence, she should be placed wholly in the baron's power; and though the mildness of his character, and regard for the honour of his house, might probably induce him to preserve her from public disgrace, her haughty

temper revolted from the humiliating idea of depending on his mercy. Every evil, even death, appeared preferable to being exposed to the pity and contempt of those whom she abhorred.

In her anxiety to shun this degradation, all other dangers were disregarded. She dared not hesitate. Each minute might involve her in the dreaded misery. Her future plans were hastily arranged, and by the first light of the morning alone and unobserved she quitted the chateau.

The intelligence of the count's death communicated to the baron and Sir Edmund soon after they left the apartment in which Sebastian had expired, strongly interested Sir Edmund on Jacqueline's account. He feared that

she had fallen a victim to the jealousy of the marchioness, and this opinion the sudden disappearance of the latter tended to confirm. But the anxiety manifested by the baron, now first informed of the absence of Jacqueline, induced him to conceal this distressing idea.

As soon as Sir Edmund had succeeded in tranquillizing the apprehensions of the baron, he immediately commenced a strict inquiry after Jacqueline; though, ignorant in what quarter to direct his researches, he almost feared that his utmost efforts to discover her would be ineffectual.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Then farewell night. Of darkness now no more.
Joy breaks.

YOUNG.

In the desolate unfrequented spot where Sir Almeric, treacherously stabbed by Sebastian, had fallen, deprived at once of sense and motion, he remained for some hours; and would probably have perished, had he not been discovered early in the morning by a woodcutter repairing to his daily labour, who, perceiving in him signs of life, conveyed him to his cottage on the opposite extremity of the forest.

For many days the condition of Sir Almeric appeared hopeless; for his wound, in itself severe, was rendered more dangerous by the long time which elapsed before he received assistance. At length the worst symptoms yielded to his youth, and the humane attentions of his rustic host.

During his indisposition the mysterious conduct and communications of Sebastian incessantly occupied his mind. The more he reflected on them, the more he became convinced of their fallacy; and the last action of Sebastian completely proved the insincerity of his friendly professions.

The whole affair appeared inexplicable to Sir Almeric, and he would have endeavoured to dismiss it from his thoughts, had not the feigned his-

tory of his parents, related to him by Sebastian, which in some parts approached the truth, strongly interested him; and more particularly as their fate was closely connected with the Baron Fitzbaynham.

Sir Almeric had not forgotten the surprise and even horror expressed by that nobleman at his appearance on the day of the tournament. It bore the impression of guilt, and seemed, to his infinite regret, to corroborate the assertion of Sebastian.

From the contemplation of this possibility' Sir Almeric turned with abhorrence. The respectful friendship which he entertained for the baron, and still more the tender affection with which Jacqueline had inspired him,

rendered the supposition of his guilt most distressing.

Absence had not diminished his hopeless but ardent love. The melancholy pleasure with which he frequently dwelt on the remembrance of Jacqueline's amiable merits, cherished and if possible augmented his passion.

From the imperfect and artful hints of Sebastian, which were calculated rather to excite than gratify curiosity, Sir Almeric collected that his descent was noble, and that his ancestors were no less distinguished for their rank than virtues. But of the unfortunate circumstances which had terminated fatally for them, and thrown him while an infant into the protection of stran-

gers, he had never been able to obtain a satisfactory account.

Anxious to elucidate an affair so intimately connected with his happiness, Sir Almeric resolved to obtain an interview with the baron, and by his conduct and explanations be guided in his future proceedings.

As soon therefore as his health was sufficiently restored, Sir Almeric, not knowing that the baron was then in Guienne, undertook a journey to England. He had not proceeded far from the cottage, before, at the angle of a narow defile, skirted on each side by an impenetrable forest, he suddenly met a horseman supporting in his arms a lady.

The abruptness of the encounter

made each check their horses, and in the momentary pause which ensued, the lady, at the same time endeavouring to disengage herself, implored the protection of Sir Almeric. Her efforts to obtain liberty rendered the horse unruly, and making a violent plunge, she was thrown to a considerable distance.

Sir Almeric immediately dismounted and hastened to the assistance of the lady, who, stunned by the fall, was lying motionless. While he was raising her, the man, having subdued the alarm of the horse, took this opportunity of effecting his escape.

The cruel manner in which the lady was abandoned excited the indignation of Sir Almeric, and gave her additional claims on his humanity. From her

continued insensibility he apprehended that she had received some severe injury; and being in that place utterly destitute of any means of relief, he removed her with as much speed as her situation would permit to the cottage from which he had just set out. Amid the confused images of past events which occupied her mind, while her faculties were only partially restored, the strange and frequently unconnected exclamations which she uttered arrested the attention of Sir Almeric. From them he learned that she was intimately acquainted with the baron's family.

A considerable time elapsed before she perfectly regained her recollection; when after warmly expressing her gratitude to Sir Almeric for the important service he had rendered her, she la-

mented that the circumstances which had placed her in that unpleasant situation could not with propriety be explained to a stranger.

Delicacy restrained Sir Almeric from pursuing the subject, though her unconscious allusions to some danger which threatened Jacqueline left him in the most painful uncertainty. At length it occurred to him that she had probably heard him mentioned in the baron's family; and were he to disclose himself she might perhaps banish this distressing reserve.

In this hope he was not deceived. Blanche, for it was she whom he had rescued from the attendant of Count Cajetan, as he was carrying her from the chateau, had indeed frequently heard the baron express his admiration

of Sir Almeric's character, and regret that he was deprived of his society. To a friend whom the baron so highly esteemed she no longer hesitated to discover the designs which the marchioness and count had planned against Jacqueline.

Sir Almeric no sooner received the unexpected intelligence that the baron was in Guienne, than, leaving Blanche at the cottage, he immediately departed for the chateau. It was his intention to reveal to the baron the atrocious designs meditated against Jacqueline, and, if necessary, to assist in securing her safety.

As the road to the chateau lay through the forest, and to those unacquainted with it appeared intricate, Sir Almeric, to avoid delay, pro-

cured the cottager's son, who had frequently travelled that way, to be his guide.

The evening began to close before they had proceeded far, and the darkness of night was anticipated and rendered more profound by the height and thickness of the trees, which almost excluded the feeble rays of the moon. For a considerable time they continued to advance as fast as the badness of the path would permit. Towards midnight Sir Almeric, surprised at finding the distance much greater than he had been led to expect, inquired whether they had not nearly reached the chateau; when to his infinite vexation he discovered that the boy, bewildered by the numerous turnings, amidst the darkness had mistaken the way.

Ignorant in what quarter the chateau was situated, and not able to discern any light which might serve to direct them, Sir Almeric determined to wait till the return of day before they proceeded. During this suspense anxiety rendered Sir Almeric watchful, but the boy, exhausted by fatigue, having fastened his horse to a tree, soon sunk into a profound slumber. A short period only had elapsed, when Sir Almeric was suddenly recalled from the melancholy reverie which he was indulging, by the sound of voices; and raising his eyes, he indistinctly perceived two persons approaching.

These were Sebastian and the marchioness, who had retired to this grove to concert the murder of Jacqueline. During the greatest part of their conference they continued stationary, so

near to Sir Almeric that he could distinguish all that passed, and thus became acquainted with their execrable project. More than once he was on the point of discovering himself; but he reflected that should he fail in an attempt to seize Sebastian, which, unarmed and still weak as he was from his recent indisposition, was not improbable, Jacqueline would be left entirely in the power of her enemies. This consideration induced him, though not without difficulty, to suppress his indignation and employ stratagem rather than open force.

With this intention Sir Almeric, favoured by the darkness, unobserved followed Sebastian to the apartment of Jacqueline. At the moment that the dagger was raised to strike her, he caught the arm of Sebastian, and

sought to wrest it from his grasp. In the struggle which ensued, a dexterous movement of Sir Almeric turned on Sebastian a blow designed for himself; which though diverted from the original direction retained force sufficient to inflict a deep wound.

Awaked by the noise of their encounter Jacqueline unclosed her eyes as Sebastian fell. She was springing, astonished and terrified, from the sopha, when, to her unutterable surprise, in his antagonist she recognized Sir Almeric. Amazement rendered her motionless; for not having entertained a doubt of his death, his sudden appearance seemed to her almost miraculous. She attempted to speak, but the effort was vain; and totally overcome by the varied and powerful

emotions which at once assailed her, she sunk back in a swoon.

Distressed by the state to which Jacqueline was reduced, Sir Almeric hesitated. He would have summoned her attendants, had he not felt the utmost reluctance to trust her again in the power of the marchioness. So completely had she developed her animosity and hatred in the conversation which he had overheard, that even the authority and protection of the baron seemed to him a slender security, while Jacqueline remained within the reach of her machinations. Anxious for the safety of Jacqueline, he could not endure that she should be exposed to new dangers, and he therefore resolved to convey her to the cottage where Blanche remained. With this inten-

tion he gently raised her, and bore her still insensible to the grove.

The information which Sir Almeric gave the boy respecting the vicinity of the chateau, enabled him to regain the right path; but in consequence of the slow rate at which the situation of Jacqueline obliged them to proceed, it was late in the evening before they arrived at the cottage.

The pleasure experienced by Blanche on again beholding Jacqueline, was diminished by the continued indisposition of the latter. In spite of the utmost attention a long time elapsed before she in any degree regained the use of her faculties. A confused idea of the recent scene was still impressed on her mind, and the unexpected presence of Blanche increased her per-

plexity. During the remainder of the day the senses of Jacqueline were greatly disordered, and excited serious apprehensions in Sir Almeric and Blanche, but towards evening her agitation subsided, and for several hours she enjoyed a calm repose. She awoke with her recollection perfectly restored.

Sir Almeric still remained at the cottage; for the illness of Jacqueline, from whom he found it impossible to tear himself while she remained in a doubtful state, joined to the fears which Blanche expressed, that in his absence the count might discover their retreat, had prevented his returning as he at first intended to the chateau.

The pleasure which Jacqueline enjoyed on the restoration of Sir Almeric,

was soon superseded by apprehensions for the life of her father. Unacquainted with the events which had taken place at the chateau on the night of her removal, and the subsequent arrival of the Marquis Villena, she entertained no doubt of the baron's guilt, which so many circumstances, but, above all, his own confession, had confirmed.

When Sir Almeric intimated his intention of repairing to the chateau, she could no longer conceal her apprehensions. The oath which he had taken to avenge his parent's fate was present to her memory, and his departure seemed to her the death warrant of the baron. "Spare my father," she exclaimed, "if you would not render hateful the life which you have preserved."

Shocked by the grief of Jacqueline, Sir Almeric sought to remove the cause of her alarm, by expressing his hope, and indeed belief, that the baron was innocent. Such was his real opinion; and he confessed, that, were he convinced of its fallacy, his sorrow would be little inferior to hers.

To this avowal Jacqueline listened with the most poignant anguish. She perceived that, though painful and humiliating, it was necessary to undeceive him. "Would," said she, "that your hope could be realized; but alas, I can only appeal to your pity." She could utter no more; but oppressed by her emotions, she reclined her head on the shoulder of Blanche.

Language is inadequate to express the sensations of Sir Almeric on hear-

ing these words. He was incapable of speaking, but remained with his eyes fixed on Jacqueline; while she, misinterpreting his silence, resigned herself to despair.

From this stupor of affliction they were recalled by the approach of a large party of horsemen, whom they immediately concluded to be emissaries of the count and marchioness in pursuit of them. At this supposition the spirits of Blanche failed, and almost fainting, she clung to Jacqueline in an agony of fear; while Sir Almeric, hastily declaring his resolution to defend them to the last extremity, rushed from the apartment.

For some minutes Jacqueline and Blanche endured the most cruel sus-

pense. Neither spoke, but in breathless agitation remained listening. They heard steps approach; and in the next moment Sir Almeric re-entered, accompanied by Sir Edmund.

At sight of her brother Jacqueline sprung forward towards him; but the sudden transition from excess of misery to joy, deprived her of strength, and she would have fallen, had he not advanced in time to receive her in his arms.

The astonishment of Sir Edmund on unexpectedly meeting Sir Almeric, who, he believed, no longer existed, was scarcely inferior to that which his abrupt appearance at the chateau had before excited in Jacqueline; but the pleasure with which he renewed their

former friendship was unmingled with the fears which the danger of the baron excited in her.

As soon as their composure was sufficiently restored, Sir Edmund, having despatched one of his retinue to acquaint the baron with the safety of Jacqueline, and to prepare him for her return, proceeded to inform Sir Almeric of the discoveries which had taken place at the chateau, and with unfeigned delight congratulated him on the brilliant prospects thus opened to him.

The emotions of Sir Almeric and Jacqueline during this disclosure may be imagined, but cannot be described. They beheld those obstacles, which appeared for ever to separate them, at once removed. Instead of the igno-

many attached to an uncertain descent, he was now the acknowledged heir of one of the most illustrious houses in Spain, and could without presumption aspire to her hand. But not having indulged an idea of success, Sir Almeric had never transgressed the silence which he had imposed on himself; and not possessing sufficient vanity to interpret in his favour the actions by which Jacqueline unconsciously betrayed her partiality, he little imagined that he was the object of her tenderest affection. No words could express the hopes and fears by which he was agitated as he gazed on Jacqueline, and sought in her countenance to read his fate.

In proportion to the distress which Jacqueline had suffered at the idea

of the baron's guilt was her joy on learning that the crime had not been accomplished. For happiness so great and unexpected she was unprepared, and would have fainted, had not tears come to her relief. She was totally unable to express the pleasure which Sir Almeric's elevation afforded her, but her looks were eloquent.

To Sir Almeric the silence of Jacqueline, which involuntarily revealed the interest which she took in his welfare, appeared more flattering to his hopes than the most elaborate compliment. He hailed it as the omen of his future happiness.

As Jacqueline, anxious for the health of the baron, soon declared herself able to bear the fatigue of

travelling, they shortly quitted the cottage, accompanied by Blanche, who freed, by the absence of the marchioness and death of the count, from their persecutions, sympathized in the general joy.

CHAPTER XXX.

To pardon willing, and to punish loath,
You strike with one hand, but you heal with both;
Lifting up all that prostrate lie, you grieve
You cannot make the dead again to live.

WALLER.

As they drew near the chateau, Sir Edmund, apprehensive of the effect of his abrupt appearance, rode forward to announce to the marquis and baron the unexpected news of Sir Almeric's restoration, and to prepare them for his reception.

With a transport, which almost overbalanced his former sufferings, the mar-

quis folded to his bosom a son so worthy of his love. His heart, long the seat of despair, once more dilated with happiness, as with trembling eagerness he clasped this last relic of Eloise. Possessed of him, life acquired some value in his estimation.

The mutual affection entertained by Sir Almeric and Jacqueline, afforded the baron and marquis the most lively pleasure. The latter often gazed on her with an emotion of melancholy delight. Her age was similar to that of Eloise at the period of their union; and though in her countenance there was little resemblance, except the general outline which usually characterizes a family, her voice and manner revived with almost painful vividness the memory of his regretted wife. "May," he exclaimed as he joined

their hands, "the arrears of happiness due to us be repaid to our children. May they long enjoy that felicity which adverse fate denied to me!"

The unfortunate catastrophe of the Marquis Omfredo alone cast a shade over the general satisfaction. Though his disposition was not calculated to conciliate affection, and the disclosure of his errors, or rather crimes, shewed him to be unworthy of esteem, it was impossible for his family to forget the tenderness with which they once regarded him. Death extinguished their resentment, he had suffered the penalty of his vices, and they deplored the premature close of that life, amid storms and clouds, whose dawn had been as splendid as deceitful.

His obsequies were privately per-

formed in the chapel of a neighbouring monastery; and as his recent death necessarily postponed the marriage of Jacqueline, the Marquis Villena took the opportunity of this interval, accompanied by his son, to visit Spain.

Since his return to Europe his attention had been so exclusively engaged in learning the fate of Eloise, that till now he had not made any inquiries after the large possessions which had descended to him, or acquainted any of his former friends that he still existed.

The amiable traits of character and the heroic actions which had distinguished his youth and early manhood, were still remembered by his countrymen with pride and gratitude; and in the flattering reception which they pro-

cured for him, he experienced at once their value and best reward. The monarch who then filled the throne, nearly of the same age with the marquis, had been his companion in arms, and having early honoured him with his friendship, had severely lamented his sudden and extraordinary disappearance, and now sincerely welcomed his return.

The estates of the marquis, which for want of an heir had fallen to the crown, were immediately restored to him; and as a mark of royal favour an honourable station near the person of the king was offered to Sir Almeric: but as it would oblige him to an almost constant residence at court, his regard for Jacqueline, who he knew would be unwilling altogether to quit the baron, induced him to decline it.

With mournful yet pleasing emotions the marquis re-entered his paternal castle. Again he beheld the scenes of his infancy, those wildly sublime prospects amid the Pyrenees where he had delighted to ramble, and which had cherished the first dawnings of his military ardour. Here he had last seen his sire, on the morning when, impelled by love, he had secretly departed to visit Eloise. As he retrod these well-remembered spots, all that was present to his senses recalled the actions of former years with the force of immediate realities. The sufferings which he had since experienced faded from his recollection. It seemed as if the intermediate space were annihilated; and the two points of his existence coalesced. Their contrast was solemn and affecting. The objects of

his tenderest affection were no more. The golden dreams of happiness and glory which had gilded that period were vanished. To his son, the sole vestige of his love, he turned for consolation: in him were centered all his few remaining hopes.

Convinced by experience of the fugitive nature of happiness, the marquis was anxious not to delay that of his son; and therefore hastened their return to the chateau.

During their absence the baron had continued, though unsuccessfully, his inquiries after the marchioness. She had contrived to elude all his endeavours to discover her retreat, and he began to apprehend that urged by the

consciousness of guilt, she had fallen a victim to her passions.

Pity, not desire of revenge, had induced the baron to institute this search; for, ever inclined to put the most favourable construction on the conduct of others, he attributed the precipitate flight of the marchioness less to fear than a delicate sensibility of disgrace. Influenced by this opinion, he was anxious to rescue her from the difficulties and dangers to which alone and unprotected she would probably be exposed.

The depravity of the marchioness rendered her a stranger to such sentiments, and she therefore believed others equally incapable of entertaining them. Terror of the most selfish kind had im-

pelled her to quit the chateau. She felt the deepest regret, not for the criminal plans which she had formed, but for their failure. To Italy she dared not return. There, since the disclosure of Sebastian, an ignominious death awaited her. But to her all countries were alike; for with the count her hopes of happiness had perished. To escape offended justice, and avoid witnessing the triumph which, judging by her own feelings, she supposed Jacqueline would enjoy at the disappointment of her vindictive designs, were the sole objects that engaged her thoughts.

In this exigence the cloister was the only asylum to which she could flee. There she expected to find immediate and permanent security. Impelled by these considerations she entered under

a feigned name an obscure convent in the north of France; and having by her liberality induced them to dispense with many of the usual forms she shortly assumed the veil.

As the terror of the marchioness subsided, the dull monotony of a conventual life soon became insupportable to her. She now, too late, justly appreciated the happiness which she had once possessed, and incessantly bewailed the gloomy seclusion to which she had devoted herself. In the silence and privacy of her cell, her crimes stood in horrible array before her. She shrunk from the retrospect thus forced on her, and sought to forget the past; but in vain. By day it pursued her steps, and nightly in frightful visions haunted her pillow. To her, peace never came. The

scenes which surrounded her were tranquil, but her heart was the dwelling of remorse, hatred, and despair.

Her constitution was unable to support the agitation of her mind. The violent passions, which continually preyed on her, destroyed the principles of existence, and in a few months consigned her to the tomb.

The eagerness which the marchioness had displayed to assume the veil, and her general deportment during her residence at the convent, excited no small degree of curiosity in the other members of the community, and occasioned various but unsatisfactory conjectures; till, a short time subsequent to her decease, the inquiries of the baron reaching them, at once resolved their doubts.

The superior immediately transmitted to the baron intelligence of the death of the marchioness, together with a description of some jewels which on her entrance she had presented to them. As these were easily recognized by the baron, her identity was fully ascertained.

Though it was impossible that any of the connections of the marchioness could lament her loss, Blanche, who had so long languished under her tyranny, could not without pity hear of the severity of her sufferings; for her gentle disposition was incapable of entertaining hatred.

The apprehensions of Blanche were by this event entirely removed, and since her infancy she had never enjoyed such complete security and hap-

piness. The friendship which subsisted between her and Jacqueline, strengthened and confirmed by their mutual services, constituted a principal part of her felicity, and made her look forward to the period of their separation with regret: for she only awaited the arrival of her uncle, to whom she had communicated the particulars of the marchioness's conduct, to return with him to England.

The misfortunes which Blanche had experienced, correcting the vivacity of youth, diffused over her manners the most engaging softness; and the air of pensiveness which usually characterized her countenance, though less dazzling, was more touching than the brilliancy of animation. All her actions evinced sensibility and a refined

understanding; and her form, light and graceful, appeared a proper residence for the mild and benevolent passions.

Possessed of such attractions, it can scarcely be supposed that Sir Edmund, daily enjoying her society, could fail to feel their influence. In her assembled all those excellencies which in the wildest dreams of fancy he had ever imagined or wished. She soon became the arbitress of his fate: to her his heart was unalterably devoted.

The eulogies which Jacqueline had frequently uttered during the absence of Sir Edmund, had prepared Blanche to respect and esteem him. From such favourable sentiments, confirmed by his merits, which on a personal

acquaintance she found justified even the fond representations of his sister, the transition to others more tender was easy and natural.

Fortune for once spared sincere love its usual perils, and smiled propitious on their reciprocal affection. The amiable disposition of Blanche had endeared her to the baron, and with joy he welcomed her as a second daughter; while Jacqueline with transport embraced in the wife of her brother her beloved and favourite friend. This alliance was equally agreeable to the uncle of Blanche; and as he had no family, she became his heiress: and thus those possessions of which her father had been so unjustly deprived, at length reverted to her.

The marriage of Sir Almeric and

Jacqueline, celebrated at the chateau by father Osborne, was soon followed by that of Sir Edmund and Blanche. From consideration to the feelings of the marquis, all useless pomp on these occasions was rejected. Their happiness depended too much on each other to require the aid of ostentatious decorations.

Attached to the chateau, the scene of their greatest felicity by a thousand tender recollections, the baron and marquis resolved to fix their residence there. In the society of each other, conversing or reflecting on former years, they experienced an alleviation of their grief.

In consequence of this resolution, the baron resigned to Sir Edmund Fitzbaynham castle and his English

domains; and at the same time the marquis transferred to Sir Almeric his castle and estates in Spain.

With regret these happy associates separated, though only for a short period; for at the chateau, endeared to them by the presence of their parents, they frequently assembled with a delight rendered more exquisite by those transient intervals of absence.

Sometimes while the baron and marquis contemplated their children surrounded by a smiling progeny, they were sensible of the incompleteness of human happiness. A sigh involuntarily burst from them, as they reflected that the beloved partners of their lives no longer existed to enjoy these scenes.

The grief which the marquis had first experienced on learning the death of Eloise, time and the attentions of his son and Jacqueline had softened into a tender remembrance of her. By his directions the banqueting-house was removed, and a chapel erected over her tomb. Here often, when the shades of evening were gathering round, the marquis would linger, indulging reflections melancholy yet too pleasing to be resigned; till the soft voice of Jacqueline would recall him to the world, and gently remind him of the sources of happiness which he still possessed.

THE END.

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